QUEER ADOLESCENT PERCEPTIONS OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING VIOLENCE: BUILDING AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR LGBTQ VIOLENCE RESEARCH

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by

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer adolescents is a serious social and public health issue. Yet qualitative data is scarce. Using multiple qualitative methods and a feminist methodological approach, this study examines how intersecting identities, minority stress, and adolescent development impact queer adolescent perceptions and negotiations of romantic relationships and dating violence. Analysis of interview and focus group data from 23 adolescents and one year of ethnographic fieldwork yield three interrelated sets of results. Findings presented in chapter four examine the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence. Sexual minority stress theory helps explain how social inequalities impact queer youth. This chapter offers an expanded framework: sexual and gender minority stress, that better accounts for trans-related stress and a changing cultural climate. Chapter five offers results specific to queer romantic relationships and dating culture. Participants maintain queer relationships are essentially "the same...but different" from their cisgender, heterosexual peers. Insights from intersectionality theory and adolescent development highlight how social location, minority stress, and the developmental tasks of adolescence together influence queer dating and relationships. Finally, chapter six presents findings specific to queer teen dating abuse. Youth unequivocally assert that relationship violence is a significant issue in LGBTQ communities. A lack of social scripts and language for queer relationships and violence, coupled with the universal culture of shame and secrecy surrounding intimate violence, help explain the
disjuncture between participants' perceptions of abuse and how they discuss actual encounters with relationship violence. Also, factors that may be especially salient to teen dating violence among LGBTQ adolescents are discussed; in order to promote understanding of why LGBTQ youth discourses minimize violence, and to indicate how LGBTQ teen dating violence may differ from that in non-LGBTQ/adolescent communities. Together, findings establish the need for an integrative theory accounting for structural inequalities, minority stress, and adolescent development. This interdisciplinary theoretical approach provides the groundwork for future health and violence research with LGBTQ adolescents. The concluding chapter outlines foundational elements of this approach, discusses policy and practice implications, and identifies limitations and directions for future research.

KEY WORDS: intimate partner violence, teen dating violence, LGBTQ/sexual minority youth, sexual minority stress, adolescent romantic relationships, feminist methodologies
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in adult heterosexual relationships has been the subject of much social, political, and academic debate over the past several decades (Anderson 1997; Gelles 1997, 2003; Hagemann-White 2003; Loskee 2005; Straus 1991; Walker 1979). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2010a), defines intimate partner violence in the following way:

Intimate partner violence [IPV] occurs between two people in a close relationship... includ[ing] current and former spouses and dating partners. IPV exists along a continuum from a single episode of violence to ongoing battering [and] includes four types of behavior: physical violence... sexual violence... threats of physical or sexual violence... [and] emotional abuse.

Topics ranging from the prevalence of violence between intimate partners, potential causes and solutions, and even the terminology and definitions used to describe intimate partner violence have undergone rigorous scrutiny in both the public sector and scientific communities. However, research remains as relevant and necessary as it was almost half a century ago, when the grassroots efforts of advocates in the battered women’s movement and scholarship by feminists and family sociologists first positioned IPV as a social problem (Anderson 1997). Intimate partner violence has certainly not been eradicated, and many aspects of this issue remain un- or under-examined due to the systemic marginalization of minority populations.

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1 This dissertation uses the phrase “intimate partner violence” (and the acronym IPV) due to the inclusivity of its definition. Other terms will be used in accordance with theories/researchers who conceptualize and label interpersonal violence in other ways.

2 The acronym “LGBTQ” will be used interchangeably with “queer” in this paper, except in when discussing research findings applicable to a specific subset of this population.

3 The phrase “dating violence” or “relationship violence” will be used to reference IPV among adolescents. The CDC defines teen dating violence as “a type of intimate partner violence... occurring between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual” (2010b).

4 Heterosexism is the attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or acceptable sexual orientation.

5 Homo/bi/transphobia is the irrational fear of lesbians, gay, bisexual, or transgender people; an aversion to LGBTQ
Variations in the experience and context of intimate partner violence among racial and ethnic minorities (Crenshaw 2010; Hamby 2005; West 2004), immigrants (Klevens 2007; Narayan 1995), heterosexual adolescents (Hall 2000; Lloyd and Emery 1999), and adult same-sex couples (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Cruz 2003; Hassouneh and Glass 2008), have been established, highlighting the need for substantive and culturally competent research within these populations. This dissertation seeks to address deficiencies in IPV scholarship centralizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) adolescents. Using multiple qualitative methods, this study examines queer youth perceptions of dating violence, and identifies social and developmental conditions that shape their relationship experiences and negotiations of dating violence and abuse.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Because queer adolescent dating violence is truly an emerging area of sociological inquiry, the literature is extremely limited in scope.

[Table 1: Definitions and List of Abbreviations]

Research on the topic focuses almost exclusively on lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified youth,

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2 The acronym “LGBTQ” will be used interchangeably with “queer” in this paper, except in when discussing research findings applicable to a specific subset of this population.
3 The phrase “dating violence” or “relationship violence” will be used to reference IPV among adolescents. The CDC defines teen dating violence as “a type of intimate partner violence... occur[ing] between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual” (2010b).
(Freedner et al. 2002), youth reporting same-sex romantic or sexual partners (Halpern et al. 2004), or youth reporting different and/or same-sex sexual partners (Pathela and Schillinger 2010). Transgender and other gender non-conforming youth are largely excluded from intimate partner violence literature. Despite a relative lack of research, recent quantitative studies suggest rates of intimate partner violence among LGB adolescents approximate those reported in heterosexual adolescent populations (Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004).

The omission of queer adolescents from sociological intimate partner violence research is likely a result of a combination of factors; it is probable that the marginalization and delegitimation of same-sex relationships and transgender populations in the larger society is mirrored in social scientific research. Further, there are methodological challenges related to access and measurement (Saewyc 2011; Waldner-Haugrud 1999), which may be compounded in research with adolescent populations (D’Augelli and Grossman 2006). It has also been hypothesized that queer individuals may be especially reluctant to acknowledge intimate partner violence in LGBTQ communities due to fears of further stigmatizing an already marginalized population (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Donovan and Hester 2010). The paucity of research on queer adolescent dating violence is troubling, however, as the more established body of literature focusing on risk behaviors and health outcomes for this population indicates that queer youth have unique experiences, needs, and outcomes as compared to other adolescent populations (Coker, Austin, and Schuster 2010; Saewyc 2011).

Much of what we know about intimate partner violence among heterosexual couples can be applied to same-sex relationship violence; however, LGBTQ IPV is heavily impacted by the
heterosexism\textsuperscript{4} and homo/bi/transphobia\textsuperscript{5} endemic in our culture (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002). Scholarship on heterosexual teen dating violence indicates significant qualitative differences from adult intimate partner violence, challenging the applicability of adult frameworks for adolescent theories of dating violence (Mulford and Giordano 2008). While there is little data establishing how adolescent dating violence may vary between cisgender/heterosexual and queer youth (or LGBTQ adults verses LGBTQ adolescents), emergent qualitative research indicates some of the experiences and perceptions of queer adolescents reflect universal dynamics and factors of IPV, whereas other aspects are unique or especially salient to LGBTQ youth due to social location and cultural context (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012).

For example, research suggests cisgender heterosexual women survivors of sexual abuse or assault typically define their experiences as something less serious than sexual abuse or assault (Harned 2005). Confusion around issue of consent, social support, and minimization have been identified as a few factors impacting labeling among cisgender, heterosexual women (Harned 2005). It is likely that a resistance or tendency to minimize or mislabel experiences of violence, abuse, or assault a universal dynamic; an issue pertinent to survivors \textit{regardless of} identity or social location. However, the motivations and social dynamics that contribute to how populations talk about relationship issues and abuse may differ, as suggested by research with both LGBT adult populations (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Gullum and DiFulvio 2012) and cisgender, heterosexual adolescents (Korobov and Throne 2007). Giordano et al. (2010) specify the need for additional research attentive to the specific features of romantic relationships (i.e.

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Heterosexism} is the attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or acceptable sexual orientation.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Homo/bi/transphobia} is the irrational fear of lesbians, gay, bisexual, or transgender people; an aversion to LGBTQ people, their lifestyle or culture, and/or behavior or actions based on this aversion.
Queer adolescent dating violence occurs as much as non-queer teen dating violence (Collins et al. 2009; Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004) and like heterosexual teen dating violence and adult intimate partner violence, must be recognized as a social issue with serious individual and community-level consequences. Further, intimate partner violence is not only a social problem, but a public health issue (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode and Rothman 2013; Vagi et al. 2013). Evidence suggests that heterosexual adolescent victims of partner violence experience more negative psychological, social, and educational outcomes than their peers; and physical and sexual violence pose serious risks of bodily and emotional injury (Banyard and Cross 2008; Collins et al. 2009; Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman 2013; Levy 2006). Further, the long-term effects of intimate partner violence on health of heterosexual adolescents and adult victims (Coker et al. 2000; Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman 2013) support the assumption of this research, which is that the negative effects of IPV/dating violence are universal dynamics, thus also impacting the health and development of LGBTQ youth.

While the general consensus is that sexual minority youth are generally mentally and physically healthy, there is strong evidence of significant health disparities and risk behaviors associated with this population in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts; especially among transgender youth and youth of color (Bith-Melander et al. 2010; Consolacion, Russell, and Sue 2004; Garofalo et al. 2006). Research on the health and wellness of sexual minority and
gender non-conforming youth is directly relevant to the research presented in this dissertation, as histories of violent victimization, health risk behaviors, and other factors that relate to health disparities correlate with dating violence and abuse (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, and Rothman 2013). It has been suggested that bias and discrimination may further compound the effects of abuse for LGBT adults (Allen and Leventhal 1999); for example, the ability to negotiate safer sex, and subsequent HIV/STD risk (Heintz and Melendez 2006). Health research on this understudied population is well positioned to provide valuable insight into the social factors that correlate with elevated health risk behaviors, disparities, and victimization, including dynamics such as minority stress, histories of interpersonal or structural violence, and familial or social support. The purpose of this study is to address gaps in sociological, health, and feminist scholarship by using multiple-forms of qualitative data from queer adolescents in Massachusetts. The aim is to explain how queer youth conceptualize conflicts and violence in relationships, and identify key social conditions, developmental factors, and interpersonal dynamics that impact their communities, relationships, and understandings/negotiations of relationship violence.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation utilizes a qualitative approach to analyze LGBTQ adolescent perceptions and negotiations of conflict and violence in romantic relationships. The primary research question this dissertation addresses is:

- How do LGBTQ adolescents conceptualize and negotiate dating conflicts, violence and abuse in their communities?
In the true fashion of a feminist, grounded methodology, during the course of data collection and analysis it became clear that certain social, cultural, and developmental factors played a central role in how queer adolescents conceptualize and negotiate dating relationships and violence.

Thus, additional research questions include:

- What is the nature and impact of structural factors and cultural dynamics in queer adolescent narratives of queer dating culture, relationships and violence?
- What norms, values, beliefs, and expectations are central to LGBTQ adolescent perceptions of and experiences with dating culture and intimate relationships?
- How do factors that relate to adolescent development function in youth narratives about dating, and relationship conflicts, violence, and abuse?

**Conceptual Frameworks**

A feminist intersectional approach to researching LGBTQ adolescent relationships and intimate partner violence is by nature cross-disciplinary. Intimate partner violence is a public health issue, and violent victimization has a profound impact on mental health. LGBTQ adolescent experiences are impacted by their social location at the intersection of multiple-minority statuses relating to sexuality, gender and age. Insights from sociology, feminist studies and health inform the conceptual frameworks that underpin this research. Research on disparities in LGBTQ health has established that social, structural, and cultural conditions have a profound impact on health; The Institutes of Medicine (IOM) points to four frameworks critical to health research with LGBT populations, including intersectionality, minority stress, life course and ecological perspectives (2011).

The central organizing component of this research is intersectionality. The population at the center of this research occupies a unique position at the specific intersection of being both an
adolescent (in some cases, legally a minor) as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer. The personal experiences of LGBTQ adolescents are directly informed by the power dynamics of their social location. Theories of sexual minority stress address the relationship between adverse social conditions and chronic, identity-based stigma and stress relating to minority status. Minority stress impacts youths' day-to-day experiences, as well as their experiences with romantic and sexual relationships and perceptions of dating violence. Life course theories focus on the significance of social and health histories, and emphasize the cumulative impact of social and health experiences. One contribution of this perspective to this study is recognition that early interpersonal-relationship experiences influence relationships throughout the life course. Ecological approaches allow for the inclusion and negotiation of the range of social conditions and factors that comprise the life experiences of LGBTQ youth: the role of structural inequalities; the effects of neighborhoods, communities, and culture; and interpersonal and personal-level dynamics. Engaging with sub-fields within children and youth studies, this research is also in dialogue with theories of adolescent development, and adolescent romantic relationships.

III. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The organization of this dissertation is heavily informed by emergent themes from the data, a decision reflective of the feminist grounded methodology utilized in the study. Multiple forms of qualitative data were collected from LGBTQ adolescents in Massachusetts, in the form of semi-
structured, in-depth interviews; focus groups; and ethnographic fieldwork with a community organization for LGBTQ adolescents.

**Data.** Ethnographic fieldwork took the form of participant observation at UNITE, a non-profit organization serving LGBTQ adolescents between 14 and 22. Ethnographic data, primarily participant observation, was collected from March of 2010 to March of 2011. Weekly youth group meetings, advisory and board meetings, events such as PRIDE parades and educational conferences for youth leaders, and fieldtrips resulted in approximately 300 hours of fieldwork over the course of one year. These data took the form of field notes, analytic memos, fliers, and other documents. This included organization-produced online content available to the general public.

Interview and focus group data were collected from 23 youth between March of 2010 and August of 2011. There were nineteen interviews, ranging from 45 minutes and two hours, with the average interview about an hour and a half. There were two focus groups, which each lasted about an hour and a half. Participants for interviews and focus groups were recruited through fliers and postcards disseminated at community groups for LGBTQ youth, posted on public bulletin boards in various locations across Massachusetts, and on the campuses of some schools and universities. Electronic fliers and recruitment materials were disseminated via e-mail through formal and informal networks. Participants were also recruited in person at community groups that catered to LGBTQ adolescent populations.

**Sample.** There were nineteen one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, and two focus groups. The total sample of 23 interview and focus group participants ranged in age from
sixteen to twenty-three years old, and was diverse in terms of self-reported sexual and gender identities. According to self-identification on demographic surveys filled out by study participants, among cisgender women participants reporting sexual minority status, there were four lesbians, four bisexuals, and one woman who reported her sexual identity as "other". Among cisgender men, ten were gay and one was bisexual. Among participants who self-identified as transgender or gender non-conforming, one identified as transgender, and two identified as queer. Participants in this sub-group reported a range of sexual identities; including: transgender, bisexual, and pansexual. The first focus group consisted of a group of four cisgender gay men; the second had two participants, one identifying as a cisgender lesbian and the other identifying as queer and bisexual. Eighteen participants reported their racial/ethnic background as White or Caucasian. Of the remaining five participants, one identified as Black or African American; one as Hispanic; and three identified with more than one racial or ethnic group (including combinations of White/Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, Black/African American, and West Indian).

Analysis. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Ethnographic data was documented in field notes, fliers and handouts. All data analysis was conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program developed by QSR International. The coding process for all three types of data was inductive in nature, meaning descriptive codes were created in response to emergent themes. In accordance with typical analytical processes for qualitative data, data analysis was a reiterative process in which descriptive and analytical coding

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6 Cisgender is a term that refers to people who, in general, feel their biological sex/anatomy is in alignment with the socially constructed gender category it is associated with.
was used to identify, analyze, refine and report patterns and categories that emerged from the data.

IV. STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research uses a feminist sociological perspective that offers valuable complimentary to interdisciplinary health and violence scholarship. Primarily, this study engages with theoretical issues in sociological and feminist literatures on intimate partner violence. Yet, data also speak to issues relating to sexual (and gender) minority stress and mental health. Results are in dialogue with the sociology of adolescence, answering the call for research on queer adolescent relationships, particularly as they relate to adolescent development. Results have broader implications for inequalities scholarship and research on health disparities as well. Findings from this study identify factors and dynamics unique to many social and health issues among LGBTQ adolescent populations, offering insights that cannot be captured by quantitative or population-based research.

Contributions to policy, practice and the community. Research presenting a detailed picture of the nature and implications of minority stress for queer youth, that explains how they view and approach romantic and intimate relationships, and conceptualize dating conflicts and violence, has significant implications for policy and practice. Most broadly, this research highlights an often overlooked and misunderstood issue prevalent in the lives of LGBTQ youth. This study has the potential to educate and inform parents and educators, to community
advocates and policy makers, about the unique dynamics of queer adolescent lives, relationships, and relationship violence; as well as highlight the ways LGBTQ adolescent dating abuse is similar to cisgender heterosexual dating abuse. Perhaps most importantly, it gives voice to queer youth, raising awareness of a serious yet largely overlooked social and public health issue in queer adolescent communities.

V. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

This study examines the topic of queer adolescent dating violence by starting with the identification of the larger institutional, cultural and interpersonal factors relating to sexual and/or gender minority status and age. It narrows in focus to examine queer adolescent perceptions of romantic and sexual relationships, and dating culture. Contextualized by these results, this dissertation concludes by addressing the central research question about queer adolescent relationship violence and abuse.

Chapter two presents a literature review highlighting the conceptual frameworks used to analyze data in this study. Chapter three presents the methodology and methods used to collect and analyze research data. Chapter four sets the stage for subsequent chapters by discussing the socio-political context in which heath and violence research with LGBTQ adolescents take place. This chapter identifies social, cultural and institutional factors that emerged from youth narratives, highlighting the utility of sexual minority stress theories as they relate to dating relationships, culture, conflict and violence. Chapter five presents results focusing on how
LGBTQ adolescents think and talk about queer dating culture and relationships. This chapter emphasizes the significance of the interrelationship between minority stress and adolescent development. Chapter six focuses on findings specific to how queer youth conceptualize, explain, and negotiate conflict, violence and abuse in romantic relationships. Chapter seven concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical significance of the study as whole, provides insight into what queer adolescent participants feel their community needs in order to have healthier relationships, and offers policy and practice recommendations. Study limitations are also discussed, and future research directions are identified.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY HEALTH AND VIOLENCE RESEARCH

This dissertation uses multiple qualitative methods to study lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) adolescent dating violence. Queer adolescent relationship violence does exist (Collins et al. 2009; Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004) and like IPV among cisgender heterosexual teenagers and adults, must be recognized as a social, feminist, and public health issue. Overwhelming evidence has established that both adult and heterosexual adolescent victims of partner violence experience more negative psychological and social outcomes than their peers; further, physical and sexual violence poses the risk of serious bodily and emotional injury (Collins et al. 2009; Levy 2006). The premise of this study is embedded in the assumption that violence in relationships has similarly negative effects on mental and physical health, as well as implications for LGBTQ adolescent development. Specifically, this research examines a piece of the puzzle of queer dating violence by focusing on how (and why) queer adolescents think, talk about and respond to conflicts, violence and abuse in their communities.

Data speak to the prominent role of structural, interpersonal, cultural and individual-level dynamics (particularly inequalities) in the lives of LGBTQ youth. While the initial intent of the

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7 The word "queer" and the acronym "LGBTQ" will be used interchangeably for variety. More specific language will be used to reference individuals, communities, or sub-populations where appropriate.

8 Some sections of this review have been adapted from an article originally published in The Rutgers Journal of Sociology: Emerging Areas in Sociological Inquiry (see citation: Smollin 2011).
study began with a more focused emphasis on how queer youth conceptualize dating violence, emergent analytical themes expanded the scope of this dissertation. Presenting key findings that speak to broader issues that shape the lives of LGBTQ youth, their intimate and romantic relationships, and the specific topic of queer adolescent relationship violence, offers a more accurate picture of the data as a whole. It also increases the validity of analysis and results pertaining to the original research question, in that the set of results focusing on queer youth relationship violence can be viewed within the context from which they came. This is especially important for research on understudied topics and populations. While larger-scale and community-based studies have established prevalence rates for queer adolescent relationship violence, we know very little about how these experiences are mediated by structural inequalities (e.g. the possible developmental effects of dating (or delayed dating), the effects of early experiences of violence, etc.)

As a minority population that exists at the intersection of multiple minority identities, the general social and cultural conditions likely impact their intimate relationships in a myriad of ways. For example, academic scholarship across disciplines established that heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia have a multi-faceted and varying, yet still significant effect on community norms and individual experience and has established widespread and persistent health disparities in these populations (Coker et al. 2010; IOM 2011; Saewyc 2011).

Addressing gaps that span multiple disciplines in qualitative scholarship on relationship violence among queer adolescents, this research allows room for queer youth themselves to lead us to key issues and topics that relate to their experiences with LGBTQ dating relationships and
violence. This dissertation begins with a macro-focus; identifying the larger institutional and interpersonal factors relating to minority status (primarily age and gender/sexuality), and moving onto the more focused topic of queer youth's ideas and experiences with queer romantic/sexual relationships and dating culture. This leads to the core question about dating abuse in LGBTQ adolescent communities. The decision to organize this dissertation in such a manner is a result of emergent themes from the data, reflective of grounded/ feminist methodological approaches.

The importance of starting with the context in which youth experience and live their lives cannot be understated; from a theoretical standpoint, it provides the necessary foundation for a culturally-responsive, nuanced analysis of queer adolescent dating conflicts and violence.

Reflective of the broad progression of the study, this literature review provides a theoretical foundation for the results presented in the following chapters.

*The Purpose and Focus of this Review*

One of the challenges of research with understudied populations is that existing literature is limited. Further, scholarship on violence is quite interdisciplinary. Thus, research focusing on interpersonal violence among queer youth necessitates a review of literature that draws from multiple disciplines. A feminist methodology centralizing participant voices also contributes to the need to address what may seem to be a diversity of substantive topics. Study findings, however, are the main impetus for a literature review that speaks to broad theoretical perspectives as well as more nuanced discussions of empirical research on discrete but connected topics. The review presented in this chapter is more theoretically-oriented than substantive; centralizing theoretical perspectives that inform analysis of study data. The results are organized
into three distinct yet interrelated "sets" of findings: (i) the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence, (ii) perceptions of queer dating culture and dynamics of queer romantic relationships, and (iii) LGBTQ adolescent dating violence and abuse. Results are discussed in three separate chapters, each beginning with brief, more focused review of substantive, topic-specific literature. The purpose of this chapter then, is to synthesize existing scholarship in order to present a theoretical grounding supportive of a connective and cohesive understanding of the study as a whole.

Feminist frameworks influence everything about this research, from the choice of topic and research questions, methodological approach, and analysis of data. The next chapter offers a nuanced treatment of the specific methodological considerations relevant to this study. While drawing from diverse theoretical approaches provides the benefit of having a wider lens to capture and synthesize information, gaps still remain in many theoretical frameworks used in violence research and research with queer youth populations. Data from the study and an integrative and cross-disciplinary approach to theory building supports the generation of stronger theories for research with queer youth.

I. INTEGRATING INSIGHTS FROM FEMINISM, HEALTH, AND ADOLESCENT STUDIES

The first set of findings, presented in chapter four, discusses the interpersonal and structural conditions that comprise the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence. It serves as the foundation for subsequent chapters, which become increasingly narrow in focus. Theoretical frameworks
identified in public health models for population-based research, insights from critical youth studies, and broad-based perspectives from feminist and queer studies provide a foundation for the overarching, and integrative approach used to organize and explain the results of this study. The primary aim of this section is to present a synthesis of the key elements of these theories and point to the ways they will be used to interpret and report on study data.

Feminist Sociology and Queer Theory

Feminist sociology and queer theories are both situated within a larger critical theoretical framework. Seeking to locate sources of institutionalized power that create and reify societal oppressions, one of their primary tenets is that disrupting patterns of structural inequalities and how we relate to them, will address social inequalities. Feminist sociological perspectives are at their core interested in locating and addressing personal experiences of discrimination and bias that are patterned into social institutions. Queer theorists specifically argue that sexuality is power, and posit that essentialist and binary notions of sex, sexuality and gender underlie the power structures that perpetuate inequalities that are based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Concepts and approaches developed by queer and feminist theorists can help identify and explain the role of structural power inequalities, as they relate to the social conditions that impact queer youth. They also have implications for research methodology, and situate research projects such as this one as not only a scholarly endeavor but a political project. These ideas and their impact on the research methodology employed in this study will be discussed further in the following chapter.
**LGBTQ Health and Adolescence**

Over the past three decades researchers focusing on adolescence have paid growing attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. However, this developing body of research has largely remained oriented toward studying deficits, and only recently has begun to recognize and investigate LGBT youth resilience (Horn, Kosciw, and Russell 2009). While allowing for a broader examination of LGBTQ adolescents, this new approach still poses significant limitations, as it “continues to treat sexual minority youth as a monolithic or homogenous groups and fails to examine the ways in which the social contexts that shape the lives of LGBT youth influence the persistent inequalities in the health risk behavior, mental health, and long-term psychosocial adjustment of LGBT youth and adults” (Horn et al. 2009:863). Horn et al. (2009) suggest focusing on how youth negotiate their development within certain social contexts, explaining:

> By expanding the paradigm to consider the role of context in the lives of LGBT youth, we can begin to understand not only the complex and nuanced ways that individuals’ lives are shaped by their social contexts, but also the ways that individual characteristics (such as temperament or gender) impact the ways that LGBT youth engage with and experience their social world. (P. 863)

Similar to Horn et al.’s (2009) call for an expanded research paradigm, the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM 2011) report: “The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding,” recommends a research agenda that expands beyond the limitations of a risk versus resilience approach to health research with sexual minority and gender non-conforming populations. Reporting on mental and physical health of sexual minority or LGB populations, as well as methodological issues in LGBT health research,
the IOM concludes that “LGBT individuals [are] not getting equal attention in research”, and “more and better research is needed to understand and address disparities” (Levin 2011:17).

Their proposed approach is rooted in four conceptual perspectives, summarized below:

- The *minority stress* model, which recognizes the role of chronic stress that sexual minorities and gender non-conforming individuals may experience due to social stigma
- The *life course* perspective, which examines how events occurring at each stage of life influence the events that occur in subsequent stages
- The *intersectionality* framework, which highlights the intersection of multiple identities and the way these identities shape experiences
- The *social ecology* perspective, which emphasizes that individuals and their experiences are shaped by multiple spheres of influence, including families, communities, and society

This dissertation ultimately approaches the topic of dating conflict and violence in a way similar to those sketched above, largely due to the fact that the data collected and literature reviewed during the course of this study evidences the necessity of a comprehensive framework attenuated to (1) the marginalization of LGBTQ adolescents in mainstream U.S. culture and the impact of bias, perceived bias, discrimination and/or violence in their lives; (2) the significance of age developmentally, as well as contextually (youths’ varying levels of support from the family), and in the broader scheme of structures of inequality; (3) recognition of the intersecting nature of identity and oppression: that LGBTQ identities are not the only identity categories or social locations that influence youths’ perceptions and experiences, but that social location does impact the privileges and penalties one experiences due to identity-related factors; and (4) that accounts for the interplay of individual, interpersonal, community and institutional-level issues. Thus, the

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following sections will elaborate on key theories and frameworks that can be tied back to this overarching model; with specific emphasis on the role of minority stress, intersectionality as it relates to identity and systemic oppression, insights from an integrative social ecological model, and elements linked to life course perspectives.

II. SEXUAL MINORITY STRESS MODELS

The minority stress model recognizes the role of chronic stress that sexual minorities and gender non-conforming individuals may experience due to social stigma. As explained by Meyer (1995), "minority stress arises not only from negative events, but from the totality of the minority person's experience in dominant society. At the center of this experience is the incongruence between the minority person's culture, needs, and experience, and social structures" (39). There are three foundational assumptions of sexual minority stress frameworks. First, minority stress is experienced in addition to the stressors experienced by all people, and thus stigmatized people must put forth adaptation efforts in excess of that required of non-stigmatized others. Second, minority stress is chronic, as it is a result of relatively stable underlying social and cultural structures. Third, minority stress is grounded in social processes, institutions and structures as opposed to individual events or conditions, or biological, genetic or other nonsocial characteristics of the person or group. In sum, minority stress is a concept used to highlight the role of excess stress that individuals from stigmatized social groups experience due to the
chronic and ever-present oppression they face as a member of a stigmatized minority population (Meyer 2003:3).

Sexual minority stress frameworks are typically conceptualized using the following four analytical categories, a consolidation of the work of Meyer (2003), Kelleher (2009), and Kuyper and Vanwesenbeeck (2011):

(i) *Exposure to prejudice-based events or conditions* (e.g. discrimination, harassment, violence). This is sometimes also conceptualized as *heterosexist experiences*.

(ii) *Stigma*. Expectations of rejection and/or discrimination due to homophobia/heterosexism and the vigilance these expectations sometimes engender.

(b) *Level of openness about sexual identity*. Hiding and concealing one's sexual orientation is sometimes included as a separate category of measurement, but it typically considered a component of the second category as it is understood to be an effect of social stigma: fear of prejudice or discrimination.

(iii) *Internalized homophobia*. The incorporation of negative social attitudes into one's self-concept.

(iv) *Social support*. The fourth category that has more recently been added to this framework, purportedly having an ameliorative effect on minority stress-rooted mental health issues.

**Sexual Minority Stress and Queer Youth**

While research has established causal relationships between minority stress processes and negative outcomes for LGB populations, sociological literature examining the particular ways minority stress may manifest in the lives of sexual minority and transgender youth is an emerging area of the field. Research with lesbian, gay and bisexual populations indicates minority stress processes are causal factors for psychological distress (Kelleher 2009; Meyer 1995, 2003) including depression and attempted suicide (Ryan et al. 2009); substance use (Lehavot and Simoni 2011); sexual coercion (Kuyper and Vanwesenbeek 2011); sexual risk behaviors such as unprotected sexual intercourse (Ryan et al. 2009); and poor school
Minority stress has proven to impact mental health as well as the quality of intimate relationships among adult same-sex couples (Carvalho et al. 2011; Frost and Meyer 2009; Mohr and Daly 2008). While there is only limited research on transgender populations, the similar challenges that transgender youth and sexual minority youth face, such as stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection and violence, likely mean that transgender youth face similar, if not greater, health disparities and risk behaviors (Garofalo et al. 2006; McGuire et al. 2010). For example, one of the first and only large-scale surveys measuring the experiences of 6,450 transgender adults from across the U.S. and U.S. territories yields dramatic findings about transgender individuals’ experiences with education, employment, health, family life, housing, public accommodations, police and incarceration, among others (Grant et al. 2011). In light of research documenting the negative impact of minority stress on the health, safety and general functioning of queer adults and adolescents, identifying the dynamics and factors that contribute to minority stress is important for a more complete understanding of issues relating to intimate relationships between LGBTQ adolescents.

Limitations. Sexual minority stress theories and their operationalization in research with LGBTQ/youth populations have certain limitations. First, they do not account for a changing socio-political context, which may impact the form and nature of particular stressors that impact young people in the contemporary U.S. Second, the theory and measures are not attenuated to the unique stressors impacting transgender populations. While research has established causal relationships between minority stress processes and negative mental health outcomes for LGB populations, there has not been much attention in sociological literature examining the particular
ways minority stress may manifest in the lives of LGB youth, especially transgender youth. For example, the elision of LGB with transgender or gender non-conforming populations is a misguided (and likely unintended) yet common practice in academic (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010) and public realms, despite the fact that gender identity and gender non-conformity are markedly different from sexuality and sexual minority status. While both LGB and transgender populations likely grapple with issues relating to the embodiment and negotiation of gender in relationships, the challenges and extent to which they experience distress pertaining to gender and/or gendered sexuality likely varies in form and impact. For example, transgender youth may perceive a threat of violence stress each time they reveal to potential romantic or sexual partners that they are not cisgender. Additionally, it is possible transgender individuals who transition may experience a second wave of isolation if they lose their sense of affiliation with lesbian or gay communities if they had been a part of them. Seeing as peer-groups are important sources of support during adolescence, this may be particularly impactful for adolescents who had but lose (or fear loss) of friends or peer acceptance.

Some SMS research is also compromised due to methodological issues impacting the reliability and validity of measures and findings (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010). Measures for SMS are operationalized in research through the use of sometimes only one, but up to four of the analytical categories outlined above. There have also been issues related to the misapplication of SMS scales; for example, scales originally developed based on the experiences of white men-who-have-sex-with-men have been employed to measure stress in lesbian samples (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010). In light of this, it is likely that some mental health and violence research
with LGBTQ populations (or sub-populations) may not accurately capture the full effects of identity-based stigma and stress associated with minority status as a member of the general LGBTQ population.

Rapid changes in the socio-political context of LGBTQ issues in the United States pose further challenges for researchers studying queer youth populations, especially so for theories such as SMS that are specifically intended to examine the impact of "social conditions" on identity-based stress. The dilemmas around the reliability and validity of research, coupled with gaps in minority stress research with sub-populations of LGBTQ youth call for better and more extensive research, especially as it relates to health, initiate relationships, and violence. While not an initial focus, minority stress did emerge as one of the more salient topics youth discussed in their narratives. Thus, the qualitative data from this study have the potential to offer insight and inspire critical examination of the strengths and limitations of existing SMS theories for LGBTQ youth in a changing society.

III. ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Also critically important to this study is the role of developmental factors pertaining to romantic relationships during adolescence, which impact and are impacted by developmental and interpersonal issues such as attachment patterns, identity development, and healthy interpersonal/romantic relationships (Coker et al. 2010; IOM 2011; Levin 2011). Building on the foundations developed in chapter four, chapter five (the second results chapter) focuses on
adolescent perceptions and negotiations of queer dating relationships and dating culture. While minority stress is a significant underlying dynamic, social psychological theories of adolescent development, and life course theories provide valuable insights for understanding the role and significance of romantic relationships, as well as relationship functioning and issues pertaining to identity during adolescence.

Current psychological research situates adolescent romantic relationships as normative social experiences that have a significant impact on individual and interpersonal development and adjustment (Collins et al. 2009). The primary developmental task of adolescence is identity-development. Romantic relationships support adolescents’ development of a distinct perception of themselves in the context of engagement with romantic partners, close peers, and their general peer group; additionally, romantic relationships and self-concept significantly impact "global self-esteem" (Furman and Shaffer 2003:4). As Furman and Shaffer (2003) explain,

> early adolescents develop a sense of themselves with their mothers, fathers, friends, romantic partners and others. Sometimes their different selves may contradict one another, but such contradictions are usually not acknowledged. In middle adolescence, they begin to recognize such seeming contradictions in their conceptions of themselves, and may be conflicted or confused. By late adolescence, many of them are able to integrate the seeming contradictions into a coherent picture. (P. 4)

While contingent on social context and specific to individuals, it has been established that for (heterosexual) adolescents, romantic relationships are significant for individual adjustment and development. (Collins et al. 2009). Further, romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence can support or challenge the achievement of normative developmental tasks of adolescence, primarily the task of identity development, and transformation of family, peer and other close relationships, and academic and career achievement (Furman and Shaffer 2003).
However, there is a significant limitation in scholarship on the developmental effects of romantic relationships as they pertain to LGBTQ youth (Collins et al. 2009; Furman and Shaffer 2003). Horn et al. (2009) note “our knowledge of normative developmental issues among this population is limited, as is our understanding of these youths in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts” pointing out that although studies based on samples of the general population undoubtedly have included LGBT individuals, they remain invisible because the questions are not asked. Until scholars in adolescent and youth development treat these identities as demographically important and include them in all work, we will never fully understand the richness and complexity of the lives of LGBT youth. (P. 865)

There has been extensive research on relationships with parents and peers as the context for romantic relationships (Collins et al. 2009). Given the somewhat tenuous nature of relationships with parents and/or peers for some queer youth, this serves as an indication that research in this area may not easily transfer to LGBTQ youths' experiences.

Theories of Adolescent Development and the Significance of Relationships

There are a variety of approaches to theorizing romantic relationships during adolescence that address varying levels of analysis; for example, ecological theories emphasize the significance of social and cultural contexts that "encourage or constrain close relationships and endow them with meaning and significance" and consequently there is an interrelationship between romantic relationships and the historical, social, economic, cultural, community, and geographical contests in which they occur (Collins et al. 2009:634). Influential interpersonal perspectives such as attachment theory, "hold that a history of sensitive, responsive interactions and strong emotional bonds with caregivers in childhood facilitates adaptation to the transitions
of adolescence," and while the optimal maturity level of this developmental process is uncommonly fully achieved by late adolescence, romantic relationships can facilitate its progress by beginning the "redistribution of attachment-related functions" earlier in life (Collins et al. 2009:634). Further, attachment theories highlight the significance of early relationships for relationships that occur later in life. Although based almost exclusively on heterosexual or different-sex pairing, this connection likely holds true for the influence of early relationship experiences of LGBTQ youth, providing support for research that sheds light on these issues.

In terms of theoretical perspectives on (cisgender, heterosexual) romantic relationships during adolescence, Mulford and Giordano (2008) offer a gender-based developmental perspective that accounts for the social context of adolescent romantic relationships, as well as the developmental stage adolescents' occupy. Specific to the developmental factors that may influence teen dating violence, they suggest a relative lack of dating experience, combined with under-developed communication skills, may result in poor coping strategies (including verbal and physical aggression) when adolescents are faced with relationship issues (Mulford and Giordano 2008:38).

**Limitations.** While the processes of individual and social development may be similar for heterosexual and cisgender LGB youth, there are definitive differences in their experiences due to the social context of heterosexism and homo/bi/trans-phobia that queer youth experience in their daily lives. There is an even more significant gap in research in the area of adolescent romantic relationships where one or more partner(s) is transgender; to my knowledge, there have been no studies on this topic among this age group as of yet. Therefore, sociological research
exploring queer adolescent relationships, specifically focusing on the issue of queer adolescents’ perceptions and conceptualizations of teen dating, conflicts and violence, is a timely, valuable, and much-needed addition to existing literature. Feminist epistemology highlights significant consequences for failing to include the voice of marginalized populations in research and theory, which lends support for an approach that recognizes individual and political intersectionality. The intersectional framework detailed below seeks to address these, and other theoretical/methodological issues, that are endemic in LGBTQ youth scholarship.

IV. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

This section will review literature pertinent to a feminist sociological study of queer adolescent dating violence, with a focus on key theoretical contributions and debates in sociological and feminist scholarship. The primary aim is to establish the utility of a feminist, intersectional approach to queer adolescent violence research; and link the debates and issues outlined below to those presented in previous sections, to illustrate the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach. Further, this section presents a substantive overview of empirical research on queer adolescent relationship violence, which indicates the potential for qualitative research to address gaps in research and theory.

This overview is specifically intended to address the third set of results, in chapter six, which focus on the topic of queer adolescent dating violence. Sociological theories of adolescent dating violence often emerge from the larger sociological discourses of family violence and
feminist approaches to domestic abuse. Current research focusing on violence and conflict in adult, as well as adolescent relationships is heavily influenced by the divergent methodologies of family violence and feminists sociologists. Therefore, a review of the existing literature on intimate partner violence must begin with a general overview of these two perspectives and their methodologies. This overview will be followed by a short discussion of intersectionality theory, a critical perspective that expands on feminist sociological thought by suggesting an alternate way to analyze how systemic oppressions impact survivors of intimate partner violence. The literature review contained within chapter six will provide an overview of themes gleaned from IPV research focusing on (1) same-sex adults and (2) cisgender heterosexual adolescents, and provide a more nuanced review of the literature directly relating to queer adolescent relationship violence. This section will begin with a discussion of IPV theories, highlight the utility of an intersectional approach, and end with a brief synopsis of substantive findings that relate to queer adolescent relationship violence.

*Sociology of Family Violence*

The family violence perspective has its roots in the sociology of the family. Family violence theorists view the family as a social institution that must be analyzed within the context of the social-structural elements of society. Anderson (1997) concisely summarizes the essence of their method and the nature of their results in the following quote:

> Employing national survey techniques, [family violence theorists] find strong relationships between domestic violence and age, cohabiting status, unemployment, and socioeconomic status that suggest that other characteristics of the social structure may engender violence. (P. 656)
Gelles (1997) suggests that cross-culturally and historically, women have always been the appropriate, or ideal, victims of violence; however, he argues that violence in the home is far too complex to explain with a single variable such as gender. This approach frames violence as a learned behavior while at the same time identifying many individual, cultural and social-structural factors that are associated with higher rates of family violence (Gelles 2003:848-9). The idea that violence experienced in one’s family of origin correlates with violent behavior or victimization as an adult is commonly referred to as the intergenerational transmission of violence, and family violence scholars cite the larger culture of violence in our society as another key factor contributing to violence. Social learning theory suggests “the family is the first place where people learn the role of mother and father, husband and wife. The family is…where we learn how to cope with stress and frustration” and we sometime learn to cope by using violence (Gelles 1997:128). Social-situational stress and coping theory also emerged from this framework, asserting that structural stressors such as low income, unemployment, limited educational resources, illness, and the like are unevenly distributed in society. Although members in all families are told that they should be loving parents, adoring husbands, and caring wives, only some families get sufficient resources to meet these demands. Others fall considerably short of being able to have the psychological, social, and economic resources to meet the expectations of society, friends, neighbors, loved ones, and themselves. Combined with the cultural approval for violence, these shortfalls lead many family members and intimates to adopt violence and abuse as a means of coping with structural stress (Gelles 1997:128).

The strengths of this framework are the range of theories it generates; addressing individual, interpersonal, institutional and social structural elements of society. However, one the main limitations of this perspective is posed by its methodology, which privileges the use of national
survey data and measures such as The Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) that are unable to account for the context in which violent behaviors occur (Halpern et al. 2004; Miller 2005). The results garnered from research using national data sets like the National Family Violence Survey and CTS are subject to intense scrutiny and debate—not only because of methodological concerns about the terms used to define violence, or the manner in which the questions are asked (Schwartz 2000:815); but because results suggest that female-to-male violence occurs at rates that are the same or even higher than those reported for male-to-female violence (Gelles 2003:847). Some researchers suggest that the validity of family violence methodology and their use of the CTS has been called into question because of the controversial results, and not the scales themselves (Carney, Buttell, and Dutton 2007; Straus 1991) but critics of the CTS argue that the most significant problem is that this approach counts acts of violence but fails to contextualize them (Miller 2005). Gelles (1997) himself denounces research that uses CTS generated data unethically to argue that both women and men suffer equally as a result of family violence, stating that

unfortunately, almost all of those who try to make the case that there are as many battered men as battered women tend to omit or reduce to a parenthetical phrase the fact that no matter how much violence there is or who initiates the violence, women are as much as 10 times more likely than men to be injured in acts of domestic violence women. (P. 93)

This significantly challenges the simplistic assumption that high rates of female violence mean that battered men are just as common and just as threatened and controlled by partner violence than women.

Despite evidence of a strong correlation between female gender and physical injuries sustained at the hands of a partner, and the assertion that gender inequality at the community and
societal level increases rates of violence against women—Gelles (2003) expressly notes that “the greater the degree of gender inequality in a relationship, community and society, the higher are the rates of violence toward women” (852)—scholars working within this framework still do not elevate gender over other factors and social processes. Feminist sociologists in particular cite this as a fundamental flaw, claiming that gender is more important than other socio-demographic factors such as social class, employment status, or family background. Critics argue that without a clear understanding of the specific social context in which the violence occurs and analysis of the way social institutions, power inequalities and the structure of interpersonal relationships shape an individual’s motivations and behavior, this perspective has the potential to provide only a limited understanding of intimate partner violence (Miller 2005).

While the family violence framework’s lack of gender-centrality makes it easier to apply to incidents of queer intimate partner violence, the limitations posed by this approach outweigh the benefits. A fundamental flaw is that it lacks the ability to fully account for social context, fails to establish causation (only correlation) and measures a very limited range of violence that present in violent intimate relationships. In addition, if what we know about adult same-sex intimate partner violence can be applied to queer adolescent experiences of dating violence, the social context in which the violence occurs is likely marked by homo/bi/transphobia (Allen and Leventhal 1999), which survey data cannot fully account for. Perhaps most importantly, this framework does not elevate the implications and effects of systemic oppression over other correlated factors, which would lead to results that do not reflect the theories generated within the body of literature on adult same-sex violence. While this framework is clearly limited in its
ability to generate substantive research to address the issue of queer adolescent dating violence, feminist sociological frameworks also pose significant limitations on our understandings and research on this topic.

*Feminist Frameworks*

During the second wave of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, activists and advocates for battered women identified domestic violence as a significant social problem, deeply rooted in the patriarchal social structure of society. Until this point, domestic violence was commonly conceptualized as a private issue experienced by individual women. Feminist analysis of domestic abuse emerged from the context of movement activism, thus its perspectives embody a specific set of assumptions and motivations: feminist activists challenged male-centered epistemologies and sought to empower women by validating their experiences. Accordingly, feminist perspectives on domestic abuse emerged from the lived experiences of battered wives. Feminist analysis, however, was not solely situated at the individual level; the larger goal was to address the structural nature of gender inequality. According to this perspective, the patriarchal social order institutionalizes systems of inequality, which results in the subordination of women in all realms of society. This theory asserts that wife battering is one manifestation of the control that men living in patriarchal society exert to maintain their dominance, and that violence is also likely to occur when a man’s sense of control is threatened (Goetting 1999). Many feminist theories of violence adhere to the basic assumption that domestic abuse is a direct result of the systemic oppression of women; but some do resist naming
patriarchy as the sole problem. For example, Yllo (2005) provides an expanded feminist view, stating that feminist analysis takes into account

psychologies of perpetrator and victim and their interactions, gendered expectations about family relationships and dynamics, and the patriarchal and ideological structure of society within which individuals and relationships are embedded. Increasingly, feminists of color are pointing to the important impact of race/ethnicity and class in shaping all of these dimensions. Although there is a range of feminist perspectives, there is a broad consensus that family violence is profoundly shaped by gender and power. (P. 20)

A broad consensus on profound effect of gender and structural power on intimate partner violence is one of the main strengths and limitations of this approach. While the family violence framework is cited by feminists for failing to locate gender and power at the center of family violence research, many feminist-oriented sociological approaches to intimate partner violence are cited for over-privileging the effect of gender inequality at the expense of other systemic oppressions. Black feminists, for example, argue that gender, race, and class are intersecting identities, and claim that the context and experiences of domestic abuse vary for women of differing social racial, ethnic, class and other social locations. When addressing the issue of queer intimate partner violence, theories of gender inequality (as it manifests in heterosexual relationships) are not applicable to the experiences of victims who are battered by someone of the same gender (Allen and Leventhal 1999). The strength of this perspective is that it generates theory from the lived experiences of marginalized groups, however feminist sociology too has a history of overlooking subjugated groups such as gays and lesbians, as well as women and men of color and working-class peoples. Feminist intersectionality theory is one approach rooted in a feminist critical framework that provides an alternative analysis of violence and systemic oppression.
Intersectionality and Intimate Partner Violence

Contemporary intersectionality theorists posit that structurally-based inequalities relating to race, class, gender, and sexuality result in shifting and varied experiences with marginalization, subordination, and oppression (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 2010; hooks 1994; McCall 2005). Intersectionality theory has its roots in Black feminist thought of the 1960s and 1970s, which challenged both feminist attempts to explain sexism without due attention to race, and anti-racist politics that prioritized race over gender (Collins 1991; Lorde 1984; The Combahee River Collective 1977). Black feminist thought produced the grounding concept of contemporary intersectionality theory, which is that race, class, gender, and sexuality are experienced simultaneously within interlocking systems of oppression (Collins 1991). While intersectionality theory does engage with dominant assumptions that categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete, it does not suggest that identity categories are mutually exclusive. Instead, intersectionality it is intended to function as “a methodology that will ultimately disrupt...tendencies to see [identity categories] as exclusive or separable” (Crenshaw 2010:483). The strength of an intersectional framework is that it has the potential to highlight commonalities of experience within marginalized groups, while recognizing that diversity within groups may result in different manifestations of common themes (Collins 1991:37).

Many contemporary scholars have used intersectional frameworks to discuss intimate partner violence (Bograd 1999; Bowleg 2008; Crenshaw 2010; Josephson 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; West 2004). In her work on intersectionality and violence against women of color, Crenshaw (2010) addresses theories, practices, and politics dichotomizing the identities of
women of color as either “woman” or “person of color,” and argues that such conceptualizations relegate the identities and experiences of women of color to “a location that resists telling” (482).

To this effect, Crenshaw (2010) presents an intersectional framework to:

> advance the telling of that location by exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color... consider[ing] how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism... hop[ing] to capture, at least in part, how prevailing structures of domination shape various discourses of resistance. (P. 482)

While the intersection of identity is an important component of this framework, attention to the structural dynamics of oppression is of equal importance. Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) foreground a structural approach in their use of intersectionality, which recognizes and seeks to analyze “the hierarchies and systems of domination that permeate society and... systematically exploit and control people” (40). This is best illustrated by Josephson’s (2005) use of intersectionality in her work on domestic violence among welfare recipients, which discusses how existing social hierarchies, state forms of social control, and the control exerted by intimate partners intersect in the lives of poor women. Josephson’s (2005) conclusion that poor women are both objects of control, but also subjective agents, supports the implication that women may respond to various types of control in multiple ways. It also speaks to another key component in intersectional frameworks of intimate partner violence, which simultaneously recognizes the victimization and agency of all battered people and remains attentive to the ways victimization and agency may operate differently depending on historical and social circumstances (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005:55). This is born from an underlying recognition that a singular focus on victimization—especially for minority groups—can function as yet another mechanism of social
Intersectionality theory holds promise for research on queer adolescent dating violence as it allows for exploration of the ways identity and social context mediate experiences with intimate partner violence. However, research produced from within this framework has not been immune to the failure of sociological scholarship as a whole to recognize IPV in sexual-minority and gender non-conforming populations, specifically adolescent populations. There is a demonstrated need for research and theories of intimate partner violence that do not rely on normative assumptions about (socially-constructed) sex/gender categories, and that can transgress the notion that identity categories are fixed within a specific system of power and meaning in society. This dissertation utilizes an intersectional framework to identify the dynamics and factors that may impact groups whose identities are shaped by both age and gender non-conformity and sexual-minority status, to “advance the telling of that location” (Crenshaw 2010: 482). Attention to the systemic nature of inequality, as well as individual agency and community-level protective factors, will be explored in this study.

**Intersectionality and Queer Adolescent Dating Violence**

Intersectional frameworks foreground interlocking systems of domination in analyses of intimate partner violence. Institutionalized heterosexism, homo/bi/transphobia, and ageism intersect in the lives of queer adolescents, and their experiences with dating violence are necessarily mediated by these structural factors. For example, heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia have been correlated with elevated health risk behaviors and outcomes for queer youth (Bontempo and D’Augelli 2002; Coker et al. 2010; Saewyc 2011), and a general
culture that is dismissive and sometimes antagonistic to LGBTQ populations increases the likelihood that queer adolescents may face harassment, rejection, isolation, and violence, both at school and at home (GLSEN 2009; Russell, Franz, and Driscoll 2001). In light of these trends, it is plausible that queer adolescent experiences with dating violence are subject to the multidimensional effects of heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia. In addition, adolescent romantic relationships generally seem to be perceived as less serious than adult relationships, and adolescents in violent relationships have access to lower levels of structural support compared to adults. The lack of structural support may be even more pronounced among LGBTQ adolescents, whose relationships are further delegitimized (or at the very least, under-acknowledged and under-accounted for) due to heterosexist ideologies and homo/bi/transphobia.

Truly an emerging area of inquiry, research on LGBTQ relationship violence and abuse almost exclusively focuses on lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified youth, (Freedner et al. 2002), youth reporting same-sex romantic or sexual partners (Halpern et al. 2004), or youth reporting different and/or same-sex sexual partners (Pathela and Schillinger 2010). It seems transgender or otherwise gender non-conforming youth are excluded from IPV scholarship at this point. However, empirical research has established that prevalence rates for same-sex adolescent relationship violence approximate those of heterosexual adolescents (Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004). The paucity of research on queer adolescent dating violence generally, and qualitative research specifically, is troubling, as health research indicates that many queer youth have unique experiences, needs, and outcomes compared to other adolescent populations (Coker et al. 2010; Saewyc 2011). This dissertation is uniquely situated to provide rich, contextual data
on the social context and dynamics relating to queer adolescents perceptions and experiences
with dating conflicts and violence. Chapter six will provide a more nuanced review of available
literature focusing on LGBTQ adolescent dating violence, as well as a synthesis of research on
adult same-sex IPV and cisgender-heterosexual teen dating violence in order to highlight some
of the dynamics and conditions that relate to findings from this study.

Limitations and Implications for Research

Feminist sociology and family violence scholarship inform the two dominant sociological
frameworks for intimate partner violence. These frameworks are ill-equipped to address the
experiences of queer adolescents who are battered by their partner. Researchers have recently
argued that feminist and family violence approaches have only a limited applicability for
heterosexual teen dating violence (Mulford and Giordano 2008), and existing research on adult
same-sex partner violence (Allen and Leventhal 1999) indicates that these frameworks are likely
to be even less appropriate for queer teens due to pervasive heterosexism and homo/bi/
transphobia. In addition, as adolescent-aged youth, their developmental status and social
experiences are likely to influence how they negotiate conflict and violence in their dating
relationships (Collins et al. 2009). While this research does not explicitly seek to explain the
cause of queer teen dating violence, it is still well-situated to provide the contextual groundwork
needed for a theory of queer adolescent dating violence, and will help fill the gaps in current
sociological theories of intimate partner violence. It is possible that the basic dynamics of
intimate partner violence (unequal power in the relationship; the use of coercion, violence,
threats of violence, and intimidation to maintain control and dominance; and the like) are
universally present in abusive relationships, but qualitative research on queer teen dating violence that establishes this is needed. Intersectional approaches have also, thus far, largely overlooked the experiences of queer/youth populations, yet the theoretical perspective is well-positioned to support the investigation of intimate partner violence in these populations.

This section provides an overview of theories specific to the topic of intimate partner violence, and foregrounds the interdisciplinary dialogue this dissertation engages with. The paucity of research on queer adolescent relationship violence establishes the timely nature of this study. Intended to be of most utility for chapter six, the theoretical insights provided are in dialogue with broader theories discussed throughout the review, in addition to the social, cultural and political context of LGBTQ issues in the contemporary U.S. community and interpersonal dynamics of queer adolescent dating and culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Frameworks identified in public health models emphasizing the social determinants of health, and insights from the field of critical youth studies provide a strong foundation for the basis for the integrative theoretical approach use to organize and explain the results of this study. The first findings chapter will present and discuss the interpersonal and structural elements that prove to be central to the life experiences of LGBTQ adolescents in this study. Frameworks for sexual minority stress are well-suited to explain the occurrence and effects of individual, interpersonal and structural dynamics explored in this section. While this chapter will identify pertinent
structural and interpersonal dynamics, they will ultimately be explored more substantively in the literature review contained within the chapter itself. Building on the foundations developed in the preceding chapter, the second results chapter will focus on queer adolescent perceptions of queer dating relationships and dating culture. While minority stress is a significant underlying dynamic, social psychological theories of adolescent development, and life course theories are especially pertinent here. Within the chapter itself, key findings will be contextualized by a synthesis of substantive literature. Firmly situated in the larger social, cultural and political context around LGBTQ issues in the contemporary U.S., as well as community and interpersonal-level dynamics of queer adolescent dating and culture, the third chapter examines the topic of queer adolescent dating violence. Most broadly, this chapter draws on intersectional and other critical, feminist frameworks to explain how queer youth conceptualize relationship violence and abuse. IPV theories focusing on pertinent issues such as power and language, and specific empirical findings relating to same-sex adult and cisgender heterosexual teen dating violence will also be reviewed in greater detail in the introduction to this chapter.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This research employs a multiple-methods approach to examine the topic of queer adolescent relationships, conflict and violence. Qualitative data collected for this study consists of 19 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with a total of 23 LGBTQ-identified adolescents; and one year of ethnographic fieldwork with a community-based organization for queer youth. This approach allowed for the collection of rich data about the norms, values, beliefs and expectations associated with queer relationships, as well as detailed information about the social contexts in which these relationships occur. As a feminist project, this study also seeks to give voice to queer adolescents, often absent from IPV scholarship. Due to the scarcity of qualitative data on this issue, the study was carefully designed to allow room for participants to influence the direction of the research. As a result, subordinate research questions about social context, adolescent development, and romantic relationships (as they relate to the central research question focusing on dating violence and abuse) were developed. This chapter provides an overview of the research design and methodology employed in this study. It presents a general picture of the data, procedures for data collection and analysis, and concludes with study limitations and suggestions for future research.
I. METHODOLOGY

Bottger (2003) suggests that qualitative methods are most appropriate when research seeks to analyze structures of meaning. Qualitative methods allow the participants to share and elaborate on their perceptions of queer teen dating violence, and in the process provides valuable information about the norms, values, beliefs and expectations associated with dating relationships. Additionally, a qualitative approach allows for the collection of data about the specific social context in which adolescent dating relationships occur, providing information about the way social institutions, power inequalities, and the structure of interpersonal relationships, shape dating norms, behaviors and perceptions of dating violence.

Critical Ethnography and Constructivist Grounded Theory

This study employs elements of both critical ethnography and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) to address the issue of queer adolescent perceptions of dating violence in their community. A critical ethnographic approach provides a general portrait of LGBTQ youth culture, a necessary precursor for understanding the context of queer adolescent dating violence. Constructivist grounded theory moves beyond a simple description of a group or issue, to generate theory rooted in the lived experiences of queer adolescents. Systemic marginalization and oppression of queer individuals and communities has resulted in a lack of research on queer culture—specifically queer youth communities. This is one of the barriers faced by researchers who seek to test or generate theories about issues pertaining to this population. Consisting of
participant observation and informal interviews, the ethnographic phase of this research provides a description and interpretation of the shared beliefs, values and behaviors of a sample of queer adolescents. Generally, ethnographic research focuses on the behavior, language and interactions of a culture-sharing group—critical ethnography shares this focus but also incorporates an advocacy perspective: addressing issues of power and inequality, seeking to empower participants, and challenging the status quo (Creswell 2006). The focus groups and semi-structured interviews are informed by constructivist grounded theory, which allows for the collection of data specific to youth perceptions of dating violence that can be descriptively and then analytically coded for the purpose of generating theory. Critical ethnography and constructivist grounded theoretical approaches are the two methodological approaches to qualitative research that structure this study. On a broader level, feminist methodologies and interpretive frameworks provide the foundation for this research.

_Feminist Methodologies_

Although there is much discussion among feminist researchers as to what constitutes a feminist methodology, below are a few of the general characteristics that shape this research:

- Dedication to conducting research for the purpose of addressing social injustice
- Values the lived experiences of research participants
- Recognizes that all knowledge is situated and partial
- Attempts to diminish the inequitable power dynamics of social research
- Acknowledges and addresses the subjective involvement of the researcher
- Situates research in the social context from which it emerges
- Committed to empowering participants through research and community involvement

One of the main presuppositions of feminist epistemology is that “the purportedly culturally-neutral conceptual frameworks of research disciplines, including standards for objectivity and
good method… [are not] culturally neutral,” but instead rooted in dominant structures of society (Harding 2004:66). Both feminist methodology and participatory action research provide alternate frameworks for research with minority populations. For example, feminist standpoint theory asserts that marginalized groups occupy a place of epistemological privilege, as they not only must be aware of the social realities that structure dominant society but also the realities they face as a subordinate group. This conceptual lens highlights one of unique advantages that queer adolescents have when discussing this topic. Feminist methodology places the experiences of the oppressed group at the center of sociological inquiry.

Intersectionality theory, a more recent branch of feminist thought, also challenges dominant ideologies by rejecting binary and reductive understandings of the impact of race, class and gender as categories of analysis (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 2010; hooks 1994; McCall 2005). Intersectionality theory rejects additive analyses that suggest occupancy in multiple oppressed groups makes one “more” oppressed, in favor of an approach that positioning race, class and gender as intersecting categories of analysis. Race, class, gender, sexuality, and age are intersecting identities rooted in an oppressive social structure that has institutional-level privileges and penalties, as well as ideological constraints. As members of LGBTQ communities are also raced and classed people interacting within a racist, sexist, classist, ageist and homo/bi/transphobic society, it is important to recognize that race, class, nationality, age and other factors influence queer youths’ experiences, vulnerabilities, and willingness to engage in research. Thus, adopting a methodology that allows participants to give voice to their
experience, as individuals and in community contexts, not only increases the validity of data but has the potential to empower participants through engagement with the research process.

Systemic oppression and dominant ideologies that pathologize, criminalize, and generally devalue queer people have resulted in a history of silent suffering, and this has significant implications for the research design and methods employed in this study. Feminist methodologies allow for research designs that give voice to queer adolescents, whose experiences as young people are often trivialized and as queer people are overlooked—not only in social scientific research (evidenced by the paucity of scholarship on this population)—but by society in general. As a queer feminist researcher, I am committed to conducting careful research that makes the lives, experiences and problems in queer communities visible, and whenever possible, empower participants to challenge the dominant and oppressive systems and ideologies that shape our society.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

Results of this study are based on data collected using three qualitative methods: ethnographic fieldwork; semi-structured, in-depth interviews; and focus groups. The primary aim of this research is to understand how queer adolescents perceive and negotiate relationship conflicts and violence: in their own relationships, the relationships of friends, and in the context of their communities. Community is operationalized in this research as either the larger (imaginary) “communities” of queer youth; as conceptualized by youths themselves. In addition, community
can be understood as specific communities of peers to which youth participants feel they belong; their social circles, or through LGBTQ-specific organizations. Thus, utilizing multiple methods to access queer youth communities within the population of LGBTQ adolescents in Massachusetts increases the depth and validity of study data. The rationale for choosing these particular three methods is discussed further in this section.

**Ethnographic Fieldwork**

Ethnographic fieldwork primarily took the form of participant observation with a community-based group for LGBTQ-identified youth. Collecting data from this type of setting is valuable as it provides insight into the general experiences of particular queer youth "communities". Ethnographic fieldwork, particularly participant observation, is an essential first step when conducting qualitative research with unfamiliar communities. One of the purposes of engaging in ethnographic fieldwork is to obtain a general sense of queer youth communities and the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence. This data is positioned to inform and contextualize focus group and interview data. The primary objects achieved through ethnographic fieldwork are three-fold in this study. Here, ethnographic data:

- Provides insight into the every-day struggles, triumphs, concerns, interests and lives of a community of LGBTQ adolescents
- Provides access to a more diverse pool of youth and their networks
- Allows the development of rapport with the youth in attendance

Fieldwork also consisted of pre-arranged interviews and many informal discussions with program directors, adult advisors and other front-line workers at organizations serving LGBTQ youth in various capacities. This offers a different type of insight into the lives of LGBTQ youth, and issues relating to dating abuse. Community workers have direct experience engaging with
the experiences of youth with whom they come in contact with; as well as a broader view of the landscape within which these issues occur. They are able to offer valuable insights that cannot be captured in data from youth participants alone.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Context-rich, qualitative data focusing on queer adolescent dating relationships, participants’ perceptions of queer dating culture, and dating conflicts and violence, were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide structure, while leaving room for spontaneity on the part of the interviewer and the interviewee. This is important in the context of this study, as the lack of qualitative data on dating conflicts and violence makes it likely that interview questions may fail to access important contextual elements or perspectives (Hesse-Biber 2007). Further, semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to raise questions that may expand on findings from data gathered during the course of ethnographic fieldwork. Engaging with one participant at a time also provides a setting where youth participants are able to discuss a topic without fear of judgment from peers. This type of setting also provides participants the opportunity to develop and engage with topics in as much detail as they deem relevant.

Focus Groups
Focus groups were conducted to collect information about how adolescents, among their peers, talk about their perceptions of dating violence in LGBTQ adolescent communities. Leavy (2007) notes that “for feminist researchers working with disenfranchised populations and/or attempting to access previously silenced knowledge about social reality...[the focus group dynamic] may be a productive knowledge-building path” (174). Given that dating conflicts and violence in LGBTQ youth communities is a social reality that has received little attention in academic and public discourse, focus groups are well situated to provide a setting for data collection that allows youth to engage with one another to produce valuable information. Bottger (2003) specifies that focus groups are useful for collecting data on opinions, attitudes, and norms that are relevant to the members’ collective (but also individual) action motives and action concepts. Focus groups offer the unique benefit of producing data reflective of youth's engagement with peers, offering an opportunity to collect a unique kind of data. This data may reveal complimentary or opposing viewpoints, allows the opportunity for youth to expand on views expressed by other participants, and perhaps makes it easier to engage with a difficult issue such as relationship abuse.

In addition to being a valuable method of data collection, focus groups also have the potential to have a positive impact on participants. Morgan (2007) adds that the “ability to ‘give a voice’ to marginalized groups” is an important element for many researchers, continuing "[focus groups can] serve as either a basis for empowering [participants] or as a tool in action and participatory research” (266). Focus group data is well situated to offer valuable insights and creates the context for a potentially empowering research experience. In conjunction with semi-
structured interviews and ethnographic data, including focus groups as one of the three qualitative methods used in this study was an intentional choice. However, complications and barriers (particularly around organizing focus groups with young people, whose access to transportation and limitations posed by scheduling due to school, work, and after-school activities) limited the focus group data collected during the course of this study. The focus group sample and data collection challenges will be discussed further in the sections that follow.

Triangulating methods is a strategy commonly used to increase reliability. Yet, the grounded nature of this research (in that each stage of data collection is influenced by the results of earlier stages) shifts the effect of this strategy towards increasing validity as opposed to reliability of data. A research design that incorporates multiple qualitative methods produces a rich, complex picture of LGBTQ adolescent relationships and perceptions of dating abuse. Together, these data contribute to a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ adolescent relationships, dating culture, and perceptions of violence.
III. DATA

*Ethnographic data.* Ethnographic fieldwork in the form of participant observation at a UNITE\(^{10}\), a non-profit organization serving LGBTQ adolescents between 14 and 22 was conducted from March of 2010 to March of 2011. Total fieldwork approximated 300 hours. This included weekly meetings at UNITE, advisory and board meetings, events such as PRIDE parades and educational conferences for youth leaders. Data took the form of field notes, analytic memos, fliers, and other documents (e.g. online content available to the general public).

*About UNITE.* UNITE is an organization whose stated goals are to provide youth with a place go where they could ask questions, meet other people, gain a sense of community, discuss coming out, talk about dating and self-identity, find out how to stay safe, and have fun. This group is part of a statewide network of community-based groups dedicated to helping young people stay healthy and reach their fullest potential by providing information, skills, and community. For two hours a week, local youth attend meetings to socialize, discuss topics that are important to them, find support, and develop a sense of acceptance and pride. The organization is run using a youth-led, adult-supported model, and weekly meetings typically consist of some free time to socialize, brief introductions, and some type of program featuring topics that include: anti-oppression strategies, coming out, health and safety, relationship development, LGBTQ history, and art and expression. Meetings are free, confidential and supervised by at least one adult advisor and several youth leaders. On average there were 25 youth at each meeting, although some nights where there were as few as 12 or as many as 40. It

\(^{10}\) UNITE is the pseudonym assigned to the organization where fieldwork took place.
is one of the only groups in that region of the state for LGBTQ youth to come together. Representative of the scarcity of programs and spaces specifically intended for LGBTQ youth outside of major urban areas, a number of youth travelled significant distances to be there (e.g. youth from our of state and/or who spent an hour or more in transit). Oftentimes youth who met each other through the organization would carpool or arrange to pick each other up from train stations or bus stops. I heard from several youth over the course of fieldwork that they would like to attend more often, but faced barriers related to access (it was too far away from where they lived, they could not get a ride, or public transportation was either not available or cost-prohibitive).

*Interview and focus group data.* Interview and focus group data from a total sample of 23 youth were conducted in Massachusetts between March of 2010 and August of 2011. The nineteen interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, with the average interview lasting around an hour and a half. The two focus groups (n=2, n=4) lasted about an hour and a half each. The first focus group consisted of a group of four cisgender gay men; the second had two participants, one identifying as a cisgender lesbian and the other identifying as queer and bisexual. The total sample of 23 interview and focus group participants ranged in age from 16 to 23 years old, and were diverse in terms of self-reported sexual and gender identities. According to self-identification on demographic surveys filled out by study participants, among cisgender women participants reporting sexual minority status, there were four lesbians, four bisexuals, and one woman who reported her sexual identity as "other". Among cisgender men, ten were gay and one was bisexual. Among participants who self-identified as transgender or gender non-
conforming, one participant who identified as transgender, and two identified as queer. Among the sub-group reporting a self-identity of transgender/gender non-conformity, there was a range of sexual identities. One transgender participant identified as transgender, and the queer/gender queer participants identified as bisexual and pansexual, respectively.

[Table 2. Gender and Sexual Identities of Interview and Focus Group Participants]

Eighteen participants reported their racial/ethnic background as White or Caucasian. Of the remaining five participants, one identified as Black or African American, one as Hispanic; and three identified with more than one racial or ethnic group, including combinations of White/Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American; Black/African American and West Indian.

Overlap of interview/focus group sample and ethnographic data. The interviews and focus groups were conducted simultaneously with ethnographic fieldwork. It is important to note that interview and focus group participants were not recruited exclusively from UNITE. Due to initial concerns about access, interview and focus group participants were recruited at UNITE as well as the venues listed above. Soon after disseminating recruitment materials, it became clear that access was not going to be an issue, and the decision was made to intentionally limit the number of UNITE participants who participated in interviews and focus groups. This was an attempt to lessen the bias of the sample, so that it did not necessarily favor youth who have direct or formal ties to a queer community of peers. This resulted in a more geographically and otherwise diverse sample; a sample not drawn from the same "community" or friendship
groups, youth with different educational backgrounds and types of college experiences (e.g. living at home versus on campus, away from parents/family), and participants who had different levels of community connectedness.

Eight of the 23 interview/focus group participants were in some way involved with UNITE. The extent of this involvement ranged from attendance at three meetings to long-term (one or more years) of involvement as group leaders. The remaining 15 interview/focus group participants did not hear about the study through their involvement with a community-based group: 13 out of 15 cited responding to a posted flier, the remaining two initiated contact after a friend who participated told them about the study.

Possible distinctions between UNITE and non-UNITE study participants. The data gathered from UNITE participants who also participated in interviews point to preliminary data that speak to the significance of social support and community ties for queer youth. It is important to note that not all youth participants in the study at large had access to social groups such as UNITE. While it is beyond the scope of this study to make connections between participation in UNITE and outcomes regarding queer adolescent dating violence, it is important to recognize the specific role UNITE participants suggest UNITE plays in their experiences with relationships, dating conflicts, and violence; how they view these issues, knowledge about resources available to them, and the general impact of community affirmation on self-esteem and a sense of community connectedness. These themes emerged from interview and focus group data from non-UNITE affiliated participants as well, albeit in different ways (significantly, often through discussions of a lack of social support and community ties). Subsequent chapters will
address questions about what types of education youth participating in UNITE were exposed to regarding dating and intimate relationships, as well as information about the ways in which romantic and sexual relationships, and queer dating culture were shaped by participation in UNITE.

IV. DATA COLLECTION

This section provides an overview of data collection procedures. It concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations for feminist research with vulnerable/youth populations.

Recruitment Procedures for Interviews and Focus Groups

Participants between the ages of 14 and 21 who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer were recruited to discuss their perceptions of LGBTQ dating and dating conflict. They did not need to have dating experience in order to be eligible for participation. A $15 gift card was offered as an incentive to participate in a focus group and/or interview.

Participants were recruited using various methods. Participants for the interviews and focus groups were recruited through physical postings of fliers at community-based organizations, community centers, on public bulletin boards, colleges and university campuses, churches, health centers and the like (see Appendix B: Recruitment Flier). Fliers were also disseminated in person at LGBTQ community groups for youth, including UNITE, the site where ethnographic data was collected. Every attempt was made to disseminate the call for participants as widely as possible within the state in which the research took place. Smaller,
post-card sized cards containing the same recruitment information as fliers were handed out at various community events for LGBTQ adolescents (celebratory events such as PRIDE and Youth Pride, conferences for specific subgroups of LGBTQ youth: queer youth or color, community leaders, peer educators, etc.). Electronic copies of the flier and a study information sheet (see Appendix C: Study Information Sheet) were also disseminated through my personal and professional networks, accompanied by an e-mail requesting that the call for participants be forwarded along to individuals or groups in their networks who may qualify for the study and/or be willing to post or otherwise share the call for participants.

The second sampling method employed for the interview and focus group phases of research is commonly referred to as snowball sampling, whereby study participants are the conduit to other potential volunteers. In this study, the snowball sampling method was used in a passive manner, more like an offering than a request. At the end of each interview and focus group, participants were asked if they would like to take a flier or information sheet about the study to give to a friend. Due to concerns about confidentiality as well as reluctance to induce undue pressure on participants, I did not aggressively recruit new volunteers through the youth who I engaged with, nor did I track how study participants learned about the study. Despite this decision, a number of participants volunteered this information, and in the case of participants whom I initially made contact with through my ethnographic work, the avenue through which some of the youth arrived at the study was clear.

Informed consent or assent. Volunteers either approached me in person, e-mailed, or in some cases sent text messages to indicate interest. At that point, I explained the purpose of the
study as well as the procedures, asked if they had any questions, and told them if they were still interested in participating after they had time to think it over (and discuss it with their parent/legal guardian if they were under the age of 18) they could contact me again to set up a time to meet. All focus group and interview participants were given the informed consent form ahead of time (see Appendix D: Interview Informed Consent Form and Appendix E: Focus Group Informed Consent Form) and youth who were under the age of 18 had to obtain the consent of a parent or legal guardian by asking them to read and sign the form prior to their participation in the study. Youth participants under 18 also had to assent to participate and sign the informed consent form indicating that they understood the expectations, risks, benefits, and their rights (including the right to decline to answer any question or stop the interview or focus group at any time). Some youth signed the form prior to the interview or focus group, but the information on the form was reviewed with every participant prior to the start of interviews and focus groups. Participants 18 or older could legally consent to participate without a parent/guardian's signature, and were required to sign the same informed consent form, less the additional signature. After the informed consent process was complete and any questions participants had about the study were answered, participants were asked for verbal consent to audio-tape the interview/focus group (this choice was presented as an option in the informed consent process). All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

*Interview and focus group protocols.* Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured. Questions were asked to elicit respondents’ reflections on queer adolescent dating culture,
experiences with and observations about LGBTQ relationships, and perceptions of dating conflicts and violence. While I had identified specific research questions I hoped to address, the study was designed to allow room for the participants to influence the direction of the research. Thus, the questions asked during the first interview evolved over time to address and explore emerging themes from analysis of previously collected data. At the end of each interview and focus group, participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic survey, which collected information about each participant's age, racial/ethnic background, gender identity, sexual identity, pronoun preference, and educational background. Participants were reminded that questions posed on the demographic survey (like all questions posed in interviews and focus groups) were optional, and that they could skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering.

Participants were then provided with a resource list (see Appendix F: Resource List) which contained information about local and free community resources and hotlines for survivors or friends/family of survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault or rape, hate crimes and bullying. There were also listings for other local and national hotlines (e.g. a peer-listening lines for LGBTQ youth, a suicide helpline, information line about substance use), and websites with information about healthy relationships and safe sex, as well as where they could get free and confidential health-related services like HIV testing. I am familiar with all of the programs identified on the resource list, and thus was able to answer most of the questions that came up. Many youth were not familiar with most or all of the programs or services available to them, and some did have specific questions. Participants were told they could get in touch with
me directly if they had any follow-up questions, concerns, or if they required any additional support in the form of facilitated referrals as a result of their participation in the study.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork took the form of participant observation with youth at UNITE and informal meetings and conversations with people who worked with the population being studied. I also collected data in the form of publications made available to youth (such as fliers about dating violence services or informational posters) and took field notes at public community events. I engaged in un-taped, informal interviews with domestic violence advocates at agencies that served the general population, as well as agencies either focusing on LGBTQ populations or who had an advocate focusing on outreach to LGBTQ folks. The primary source of ethnographic data came from participant observation that took place from March of 2009 to March of 2010 at UNITE, a weekly, two-hour long social group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth between the ages of 14 and 22.

I rarely collected data in the form of field notes during the actual meeting itself, unless the meeting was specifically dedicated to a topic like "healthy relationships." Most often I had brought my laptop and took field notes as I waited for and took public transportation home. The form and content of the educational programming, the informal conversations, and publications made available for youth, as well as observations about how youth received or made use of this information were included in field notes. I did not record names, or other identifying information. Field notes from participant observation in this setting were typically typed, and the few that were hand written were reviewed for pertinent information and relevant sections were
subsequently typed-up and/or scanned. Observations, patterns, and questions to pursue were identified in monthly reviews of data collected during fieldwork.

As a participant-observer, I occupied an interesting position in the organization. It was not my sense that the youth viewed me as either a true participant nor an adult supervisor. At different times before the meeting started, although rare, youth attendees asked me if it were my first time going to the group. In those cases I explained that I was there to as a researcher hoping to learn about the ways queer youth talk about dating conflicts. After awhile, most of the youth who regularly attended knew who I was and what I was there for, although at every meeting as we went around a circle introducing ourselves I gave a brief statement about my research and specified my purpose for being at the meeting. Passive consent/assent was obtained from participants in this statement as well: I made it clear that if anyone had a concern about my presence, they could let any of the youth-leaders or adult advisors know (in confidence) and I would leave the meeting. Prior to attendance at UNITE, an informed consent document was signed by the Executive Director of the organization.

*Ethical Considerations and Safeguards*

As a feminist researcher, I strongly believe that social research with queer youth should incorporate a methodology that focuses on empowerment and resilience, as this group is already subject to marginalization and structural oppression. I am acutely aware that poorly conceived research, conducted under the guise of scientific objectivity, has the potential to further silence and victimize queer individuals and communities. For this reason, methodologically rigorous, ethical and sensitive research is essential. Such research has the potential to have a positive
impact on individuals, and is a necessary first step in addressing social injustices faced by LGBTQ populations. As such, safeguards are necessary to address potential risks, and procedures and practices that support youth empowerment are integral to consideration of ethical issues in violence-related research with LGBTQ adolescents.

**Risk of harm.** There were minimal risks posed by the participant observation phase of this research, as participants were not asked to do anything differently from what they would normally be doing during UNITE meetings, and their presence and participation at UNITE was not recorded by me at any point during the research. My role as a researcher was fully and intentionally transparent. In discussions of UNITE meetings or events that occurred during meetings, any possibly identifying information has been changed. The most risk associated with this study was the possibility of psychological distress when discussing topics relating to relationship violence in focus groups and interviews. Although potentially serious, it seemed as though most participants felt fully comfortable, and only in a few instances did some participants seem to experience anything more than mild discomfort as a result of their participation. I did not directly ask about current or past experience with violence, as my focus was on questions about their perceptions of relationship violence, although some youth chose to volunteer examples relating to their personal experiences or examples drawn from their recollection of interactions with friends. For the two focus groups, a trained domestic violence advocate was on the premise in the event something came up that prompted the need for a participant to leave the group to talk independently. This did not prove to be necessary during either of the two focus groups.
Another possible risk posed by this research was premature or unwanted disclosure of a participant’s sexual or gender identity, although this was only a real possibility in cases where a youth under the age of 18 wanted to participate in an interview or focus group and was faced with the choice of asking a parent or legal guardian to sign the required informed consent form. While the seriousness of this is variable, the likelihood of this occurring was low. I made sure to take certain precautions, such as deciding not to recruit aggressively (all youth participants initiated contact). After first contact, and prior to arranging an interview or focus group, I provided informed consent forms for their continued review and consideration and asked them to contact me directly over e-mail, phone or text if they were still interested in participating after looking over the form. I was explicit (for participants under the age of 18) that they would need to ask a parent or legal guardian to sign the form. I encouraged youth to consider whether this may cause problems for them, and for youth who seemed unsure, I encouraged them not to participate.

While this likely biased the sample towards youth who had some support of family (at least, this can be assumed to be true of the portion of the interview and focus group sample who were under 18 years old) it seemed irresponsible and unethical to do anything but discourage a youth from making a serious decision about coming out about being LGBTQ to a parent for the first time by asking them to sign an informed consent form for the purposes of participating in this research. D’Augelli and Grossman (2006) cite research findings indicating that “LGB youth living at home and who disclosed their sexual orientation to parents were victimized more often by families than youth who remained ‘closeted’…the disclosure of a youth’s sexual orientation
to family members who did not know [may] induce stress [that] might, in some circumstances, lead to serious outcomes, including disowning the youth or victimization” (49). In addition, all recruitment materials (including fliers) clearly list the following stipulation in the qualifications section: “If you are under 18: you’re willing (and it is safe) for you to obtain parental consent”. For focus groups specifically, I asked youth participants to agree that what was talked about during the group was confidential, pointing out that even saying things like "hey, I met you at that focus group!" might compromise that confidentiality.

Data was also subject to procedures to ensure confidentiality. Interview and focus group data were assigned codes and pseudonyms were assigned upon transcription. Audio recordings were promptly deleted after transcription. Any identifying information was also changed. I discussed with participants how and when they would like to be contacted if future correspondence was planned (for example, to set up a time for the interview) and worked with the participants to find out if there were any other concerns about confidentiality in order to create a plan to safeguard against breaches of confidentiality.

*Reporting evidence of imminent risk of harm.* Another issue posing a slight risk of harm, but also served as a safeguard, related to mandated reporting for participants under the age of 18. While the indirect risk of associated with mandated reporting may be significant for youth participants, the likelihood of needing to report that a youth was at risk of imminent danger was deemed to be low due to the focus and scope of the research. I committed to abide to mandated reporting procedures as a safeguard for participants through the IRB process, and my association
with UNITE required mandated reporting for specific situations (determined by the commonwealth of Massachusetts) for youth under the age of 18.

To address possible indirect risks posed by adherence to mandatory reporting laws, I incorporated information about mandating reporting into the consent process. I also began each focus group and interview by unambiguously communicating that I would adhere to mandated reporting standards, explaining what that means to ensure youth understood before we moved forward. I also reminded youth they can choose not to answer any question, for any reason, during any point in the focus group or interview.

*Power imbalances in the research process.* A less direct risk posed by the research process as a whole is the potential for the researcher to exploit the participants due to her relative power. As Fontes (1998) notes, scientific research is embedded in the larger power structures of society, and conducting research mirrors and reinforces certain power imbalances. As a researcher with a strong feminist background, I felt committed to addressing the issue of inequality and sought to decentralize authority in the research process. This is not only an issue of adhering to a personal ethic that values equality, but also key to producing research that is less biased, less influenced by my own assumptions, and more attentive to what participants identify as important. As such, in addition to the strategies presented in the methodology section, I decided not to take on an official supervisory or disciplinary-type role at UNITE during the ethnographic data collection. I also made it clear to all participants that they are in full control of what information they wish to disclose, both before obtaining consent/assent, and after obtaining consent/assent in focus groups and interviews. In addition to disclosure procedures built into the
research design, I made special efforts to make the process transparent; often reminding youth participants I was a researcher, explaining what researchers do, and how/what type of information I was collecting. In public settings where I was an attendee or guest of UNITE, I was proactive about identifying myself as a researcher and talking about my research. If a youth asked to talk to me privately about a personal problem, I reminded them (using more accessible language) that I agreed to adhere to standards set for mandated reporters in Massachusetts. I openly and honestly answered any questions posed by participants during all stages of data collection, including personal questions that matched what was appropriate to the situation. I participated fully in UNITE meetings, and did not withhold information about my gender or sexual identity, relationship status, educational background, age, etc.

**Researcher bias.** Fontes (1998) discusses the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when conducting cross-cultural research on family violence, and suggests that “conducting research and disseminating findings are political acts...Researchers who wish to choose their political stance consciously, rather than simply adopting the 'default option' of supporting the status quo, must engage in a deliberate process of questioning their research motives and methods” (55). Schwartz (2000) agrees, and extends the discussion by specifically identifying the design of questions as both a scientific and political process. She problematizes the operationalization of key terms, including what counts as violence. In accordance, questions posed in focus groups and interviews were carefully constructed and re-constructed to reflect previously collected data gathered through ethnographic research as well as interview and focus groups. Participants were given significant freedom in the ways they chose to interpret and
answer questions and lead discussions. Attention to the political nature of research is especially relevant to this study in light of the current socio-political context of the United States, where queer rights are a hotly contested topic. I am not neutral in terms of my personal views on LGBTQ-related issues and policies. However, most of my personal views were not relevant to the focus of this study. I recognize the study was designed with the underlying assumption that LGBTQ-youth dating violence is a significant, understudied issue; but I do not believe this assumption had a significant impact on the data that was collected. Efforts to recognize and mitigate the role of power in the research process, and disrupt the silence around LGBTQ issues, both serve to destabilize the disempowering nature of the treatment of LGBTQ-individuals, communities, and issues that are endemic in social institutions such as academia and society at large.

Another way to address the issue of politics and bias is by incorporating reflexivity into one’s methodology. Feminist standpoint theory posits that the positionality of the researcher has significant implications for what information can be obtained and how research is transformed into knowledge. It is important to reflect on how my identity as a white, middle-class, lesbian in my twenties mediated the relationships I had with respondents. It is also important to consider what information I may or may not have obtained because of my race, ethnicity, gender, age, and perceived social class position. In light of this, identity and perspective can have a positive effect on research by helping the researcher gain access and establish rapport; however, it can also pose challenges and limitations. In this study, I am sure my position as a cisgender woman may have played a role in the relative lack of discussion around issues relating to participants'
perceptions of possible racial, ethnic, or cultural differences due to discomfort or other concerns that I may not even be aware of.

*Research Integrity and Commitment to Activism*

It is important to discuss my motivations for choosing to research queer adolescents’ perceptions dating violence as well as how I approached the topic as a feminist researcher. I decided to stick with this research, despite the challenges, because the experiences of queer youth matter, and the relationships they engage in are just as significant and worthy of research as those of queer adults, heterosexual teenagers and heterosexual adults. I also believe the health, safety, and emotional well-being of queer youth are compromised by a variety of social factors, including their invisibility in research and theory. Some argue that the line between research and advocacy must be blurred for political reasons, or to gain the trust of your respondents, but like Fontes (1998) I believe it is essential to ensure that the scientific rigor and ethical protocols of the research are not compromised by personal motivations. I do consider my research to be a form of activism, and my choice of topic and population of interest are clearly a result of my personal and political motivations. However, all of the decisions made in the construction of this research design have been carefully evaluated, are firmly grounded in existent literature on the topic, and informed by discourses regarding the relative strengths and limitations of theories and methods.

I was intentional in my design of study procedures. For example, while I did not want to compromise the integrity of the data I did feel it was important to increase youth participants' access to information and resources relating to healthy relationships, relationship and sexual
violence, as well as free and confidential services they may benefit from. I chose to do this by providing a Resource List after data was collected, and I made sure to go over the resource list in detail, explaining the types of things they could call the rape-crisis center hotline about, mentioning they did not have to provide identifying information if they did not feel comfortable, and offering help accessing additional resources even after they left the interview/focus group setting. Every participant in the study had my personal cell phone number, and many youth participants at UNITE also had access to my phone number through contact with recruitment materials (text messaging was identified by many as the best way to arrange interviews). I also felt that limiting youth to contacting me via e-mail may be a hardship for youth who did not have regular or unmonitored access to the internet, and that providing my phone number communicated my commitment to engaging with participants in a way that maintained appropriate professional boundaries, but did not pose arbitrary limitations (like preventing youth from having my phone number because of the possibility they may use it to contact me about non-study or resource-related issues). While that was a possibility, that a participant or youth may have used my phone number to contact me outside of the context of participation in the study, there was not one occasion where that occurred.

Similar in terms of intent to providing the resource list to focus group and interview participants, I made a point to make it clear I would be happy to facilitate referrals for UNITE participants. On many occasions I provided information about local resources and hotlines for a variety of issues (related and unrelated to relationship/sexual violence) and helped youth locate (or attempt to locate) for example, services and programs relating to housing and homelessness.
I also did things like make copies of a booklet of local resources a youth participant put together after noticing that many of the resources provided to youth through booklets, cards and other fliers on the "Resource Board" were not that accessible to people in the geographic region where UNITE was located. I was intentional in the ways I engaged with queer youth communities to support the dissemination of information and resources, as well as provide support for youth's individual efforts to be agents of social change. I chose to be of use to youth participants and UNITE in ways that I felt, after careful consideration, would not have a direct impact on the data and results of this study. In cases where I did feel my actions may lead to bias, for example, when asked to lead UNITE meetings on topics relating to teen dating violence, I declined. When asked to participate in meetings that may feature my research, I made sure to limit my presentation to what my research was focusing on, and how I was collecting data, as opposed to making projections about "results".

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The research questions and methodological approach require an inductive approach to data analysis. This means that I did not begin to analyze data with the intent of testing a specific theory or set of hypotheses. Instead, I used an open coding process, where initial codes reflected content-specific ideas, and analytic codes were developed over time in response to emergent themes. In accordance with typical analytical processes for qualitative data, data analysis was a
reiterative process in which descriptive and analytical coding was used to identify, analyze, refine and report patterns that emerged from the data.

All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Ethnographic data consisted of typed field notes from UNITE meetings, as well as handwritten notes, fliers and other documents collected in the field. Data analysis was primarily conducted with the assistance of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program developed by QSR International. All data not in electronic form was scanned, so that the entire data set could be uploaded, contained, and organized in NVivo. Once held in NVivo, all interview and focus group data, and select sets of ethnographic data (parameters discussed in a section that follows) were analyzed inductively, using a specific process referred to as thematic analysis by Saldaña (2009) and described in greater detail below. As explained by Bazeley (2007), “the use of a computer is not intended to supplant time-honored ways of learning from [qualitative] data, but to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of such learning. The computer’s capacity for recording, sorting, matching and linking can be harnessed by the researcher to assist in answering their research questions from the data, without losing access to the source data or context from which the data have come” (2).

*Grounded and interpretive constructivist frameworks.* The process and aim of the approach to analysis used in this study is reminiscent of Glaser and Straus' grounded theoretical approach. A grounded approach is best summarized by Priest, Roberts, and Woods (2002) as "an iterative process involving concurrently collecting and analyzing data with the ultimate aim of generating a theory (during the actual research) that is 'grounded' in the natural context in which
the inquiry takes place," (31). In addition, the methodology that drove this approach to analysis was based on an interpretive constructivist framework, which prioritized the meaning-making of participants. Thus, an underlying assumption was that participants chose what was important to highlight about the topic of study in the course of their narratives. The open-ended and semi-structured nature of interview questions allowed for flexibility in this regard.

Thematic analysis. With the specific goal of remaining close to the research, a more precise explanation of the way I conducted analysis is sometimes referred to as thematic analysis, which consisted of three main steps. I began coding small groups of interview and focus group transcripts after transcription, and as I continued to collect data. These early reviews were conducted by hand: I printed and read through entire transcripts, and then went back and wrote notes describing the content in the margins. During this process, I began to identify ideas, topics, and dynamics related to the research topic, and also began to write analytical memos (or notes) about things I noticed as I coded data, such as possible connections, reoccurring themes, etc. After I had a basic sense of the general breadth and depth of content that interviews and focus groups contained, I began the process of "initial coding", an open-ended coding process resulting in the identification of general themes in NVivo (Saldaña 2009:4). In the second phase, all data were coded in NVivo. The second phase consisted of multiple reviews of each text, identifying first descriptive codes, which as Saldaña (2009) describes as "a code summarize[ing] the primary topic of the excerpt"; many of which were in vivo, or "codes taken directly from what the participant...says" (3). Lastly, after undergoing several rounds of increasingly refined coding,
the final stage of analysis consisted of the generation of new interpretive constructs: analytical themes, where explanations or hypothesis were generated (Saldaña 2009).

Since interview and focus groups were transcribed and reviewed during the data collection process, new interview questions and prompts were informed by emergent themes from prior interviews. For example, when I noticed youth participants tended to discuss social dynamics impacting queer dating relationships and culture before they began to fully-articulate issues pertaining to dating conflicts and violence, I began to start with open-ended questions about dating relationships and culture more generally, and worked towards questions about conflicts and violence. Themes pertaining to LGBTQ adolescent perceptions and experiences of queer dating culture, as well as conceptualizations of dating conflict and violence were identified during this reiterative process of data analysis. The same was true of themes pertaining to stress and stigma, which were not initially a primary focus of this dissertation.

Coding stress and stigma. The breadth and depth of data on the social context of queer adolescents lives, and emergent themes relating to stress and stigma ultimately resulted in the set of findings presented in chapter four. The general coding scheme that informed the results of chapter four, evolved from the initial, sole use of a grounded theoretical approach, to a combined approach drawing on previously established analytic codes representing patterns of sexual minority stress (Meyer 1995, 2003). Analysis of the nature of stress in youth narratives was both inductive and in later iterations, loosely based on an amalgamation of the work of Meyer (1995, 2003), Kelleher (2009), and Kuyper and Vanwesenbeeck (2011). Meyer identifies three sexual minority stress processes specific to LGB individuals: prejudice-based events, perceived stigma,
and the internalization of negative social attitudes. Kelleher's (2009) operationalization of sexual minority stress similarly used three indicators: sexual identity distress, stigma consciousness, and heterosexist experiences. These are discussed at length in the previous chapter, and served as the basis for categorizing some of the emergent themes pertaining to stress in later stages of coding and re-coding of youth narratives. Segments of the transcripts focusing on stress or pressure that did not fit these categories were coded inductively, as it was possible new themes could emerge that were representative of change in the experiences of chronic, identity-related stress among study participants. Analysis yielded findings that both fit previously established components of sexual minority stress, offered new insights into previously identified components, and resulted in the construction of a new analytical category. This was the process of analysis that resulted in the expanded sexual minority stress framework presented in chapter four.

**Analysis of ethnographic data.** The vast majority of the data gathered through fieldwork with UNITE did not specifically address the original research questions. Nonetheless, these data proved to be immensely valuable in providing a broader context within which to understand LGBTQ adolescents' lives, and consequently, dynamics and issues relating to romantic and intimate relationships. Further, patterns and themes from this data reflected and supported emerging themes around stress and stigma relating to LGBTQ-status. Thus, the entire body of data gathered during fieldwork was not subject to the same type of systematic analysis used to analyze the interview and focus group data. However, if a group conversation or meeting topic related in some way to issues around healthy dating relationships, dating conflict and/or violence, or stress, it was coded in accordance to the processes outlined above. Similarly, notes
from conversations with individual youth and informal interviews with adults associated with UNITE or community partners were also coded using thematic analysis. For all other cases, the general approach to data analysis for ethnographic fieldwork consisted of a monthly review of field notes, with the dual purpose of (1) composing a broad list of themes that could be used to understand the social context of LGBTQ adolescent's lives; and (2) to identifying themes, issues or dynamics to focus on or explore further in interviews and focus groups.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the limitations posed by the research design was sampling bias: self-identified, LGBTQ youth were the focus of the study--not youth who may engage in same-sex sexual behaviors but may otherwise identify. Self-selection was also a source of bias, as youth who are LGBTQ-identified may be more accepting of their sexual minority status or transgender/genderqueer identity than youth who would not identify in this way. This may also have prevented youth who may be unsure about their identity, or who would not elect to engage in a study focusing on this particular element of their identity. This means that the sample is likely biased towards having less minority stress relating to LGBTQ identity than the entire population of sexual minority and transgender youth.

Likewise, youth who were interested in talking about relationships and conflict were probably more likely to notice calls for participation for interviews and focus groups, although data on why youth chose to participate offered a range of motivations. Only a small number of
participants explicitly stated a motivation relating to the desire to talk about relationship conflicts or violence; many stated reasons for being interested in the study included things like "I thought it would be cool to be in a study;" "no one ever focuses on us [LGBTQ-populations];" and "I had nothing else to do before finals."

It is also important to note that there are significant differences in the experiences of LGBTQ youth based on race, class and religious background (among other factors) that are certainly relevant to this discussion--yet the sample was heavily biased towards White/Caucasian youth. The results are also likely influenced by the geographic location from which the sample was drawn. This particular state in the northeast has generally LGBTQ-affirming laws and policies, and the state provides some funding for programs for LGBTQ youth.

This study was biased towards LGB populations; while ethnographic data provided valuable insights into the experiences of diverse trans-identified youth; there were only four interview/focus group participants (of a total of 23) who identified as transgender. This is a limitation that impacts findings relating to trans-identified participants, and emergent themes relating to trans-specific experiences or perspectives should be viewed as preliminary, exploratory findings. Because research on this topic as a whole is largely exploratory, identifying trends specific to any sub-group of LGBTQ adolescent communities was determined to be more limiting than useful at this point; and given the emphasis on community in determining the methods and sampling frame for this study, is also not possible due to limitations posed by the data.
Focus Groups. The focus group data was limited due to challenges related to the logistics of organizing groups of adolescents (and subsequently, participants following through on commitments to participate). Originally I had planned to conduct three or four focus groups, a number that was already smaller than the typical standard for sociological research, which typically ranges from four to six (Morgan 2004: 276-8). Because I was using multiple methods to collect data, and due to initial concerns about access, I had assumed that conducting one-on-one interviews may be more likely to yield results, although due to the value of focus group data, sought to include this method in the research design. While conducting one-on-one interviews did turn out to be easier to accomplish, the issue was not one of access; access was not the main impediment to collecting focus-group data. Many youth who volunteered were willing to engage in research in a focus group setting, but other unanticipated barriers prevented this from occurring. Finding a location central to the youth expressing interest at any given time-period, that could also be accessed without a car and that was private enough to ensure confidentiality, at a time that fit with school and work schedules, proved immensely difficult. Additionally, I wanted to ensure focus groups were not too diverse in terms of age. Based on adolescent development literature, it seemed most appropriate for focus groups to consist of either 14-18 year-olds (high-school aged youth) or 18-22 year-olds (late adolescents/emerging adults).

Interviews were easier to arrange because I could travel to a location that worked for them and that fit their schedule. Many youth who volunteered to participate in a focus group but for whom it was logistically not possible did arrange a one-on-one interview. There were several occasions where youth participants scheduled and rescheduled meetings, sometimes at the last
minute, and sometimes without any notice. This is part of the reason the focus group sizes were so small. For the first focus group, I expected four participants, but only two came to the meeting site; for the second focus group, I expected five, but only four gathered at the specified time and place. Therefore, in efforts to be respectful of the commitments and expectations of fellow study participants, and to preserve resources (my time, the time of the domestic violence advocate who volunteered to be present for focus groups, travel and other related expenses) ultimately resulted in the decision to focus on arranging and obtaining interview data from youth interested in participating in the study. Although the small number of focus group participants per focus group was not especially problematic due to the emotionally-charged nature of this topic (Morgan 2004:276-8), and in-depth interviews provided enough data to reach saturation on the topic, it likely would be useful to consider focus group-based research in the future as it is a method that allows for unique dynamics and discussions that may provide data unlikely to emerge from interview settings.

Suggestions for future research. This research is largely exploratory, examining how queer youth think about the dating culture of their communities, their relationships, and the dating conflicts and violence that sometimes occur in these relationships. Qualitative data of this sort is a necessary building block for a theory of queer adolescent dating violence that is not limited by the constraints of frameworks developed for adults or heterosexual teenagers. Due to the rather large gap in existing research on queer adolescent romantic relationships, qualitative data contextualizing dating violence, and queer adolescent development, future research may focus on any of these areas. Future research should consider isolating subgroups of LGBTQ
populations as it is possible there are differences that were not captured due to the limitations of this study. While ethnographic data spoke to issues specific to trans-identified youth--there were always two or more trans/gender-queer identified adolescents in attendance at UNITE; there were only four transgender interview and focus group participants; thus, transgender youth were less represented as a whole in study data than sexual minority (or LGB) youth. Research focusing on similarities and differences that may present among specific sub-populations would add depth to the discussion of adolescent dating conflicts and violence.

VII. CONCLUSION

As feminist scholar and queer activist, the political work of addressing the often-overlooked problems facing marginalized communities is integral to the methodology and methods employed in this study. The three chapters that follow present the results of the study, starting first with macro-level findings relating to social context, narrowing in focus to youth's perceptions of queer relationships and dating culture, and finally ending with a specific discussion of the way youth conceptualize queer adolescent dating violence. The results are presented in a manner that reflects the methodological and feminist commitment to giving voice to queer youth, and illustrative excerpts from their narratives are central to the presentation of emergent themes.
CHAPTER 4: THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF LGBTQ ADOLESCENT LIVES

The socio-political climate around LGBTQ issues has changed dramatically in the past decade, and the visibility, recognition, acceptance and affirmation of LGBTQ individuals and communities continues to change along with laws and policies. Yet, it would be remiss to assume that these shifts signal the eradication of structural inequalities that impact the everyday lives of queer youth in the United States. As Images 1 and 2 above suggest, LGBTQ youth occupy a liminal space marked by a complex and shifting socio-political context where affirmative social change and enduring structural inequalities coexist. This chapter presents analytic themes gleaned from qualitative data that identify the nature of the adverse social conditions that impact LGBTQ adolescents. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a
foundation for contemporary health and violence research with queer youth, and contextualize results presented in the chapters to follow. Identifying emergent themes from ethnographic, interview, and focus group data provides a clear picture of the individual and community level impact of structurally-rooted inequalities for youth in this sample. The results presented here are critical for understanding study findings specific to queer dating and relationship abuse. The results of this chapter also provide a foundation for the assessment and construction of instruments in fields of study that rely on established measures for concepts such as stress; measures which may or may not maintain the same level of validity as when they were first constructed due to a changing socio-political climate around LGBTQ issues and populations.

Feminist theories explaining the intersectional nature of oppression and sexual minority stress frameworks established by health researchers, elucidate the way structural oppression, culture, and community intersect in the lives of queer youth. Intersectional frameworks help explain the experiences of queer youth, whose social location put them in the unique position of being young in an adult-centric world, while also occupying the subjugated position of being a sexual minority and/or transgender or gender queer. Youth in this sample are impacted by dynamics and factors attributable to non-sexual minority/transgender/adolescent statuses (such as privileges and penalties related to differing racial or ethnic backgrounds); however, this study emphasizes the specific dynamics and factors pertaining to the intersection of age and sexual minority/transgender status. Minority stress theories highlight the negative effects of chronic, identity-based stress that individuals from stigmatized social groups experience (Meyer 2003:3). Topical themes speak to the nature of challenges youth face relating to culture and community
(both dominant and queer), friends and peers, the media, family, school, politics, and religion. Analytic themes, organized loosely around the central components of sexual minority stress frameworks, illustrate how direct experiences of harassment and violence, marginalization and isolation due heteronormativity, real or perceived stigma, and the internalization of identity-related stress, profoundly shape the worldview and life experiences of queer youth. Specific to the aims of this study, the data presented in this chapter evidence the importance of recognizing social context and stress as it relates to queer youth dating culture and relationships and conceptualize and negotiate relationship conflicts and violence.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

A Changing Socio-Political Context

Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in the contemporary United States live in a unique socio-political context. They are one of the first generations to grow up during a time where “gay issues” have been prominent in public discourse (Russell 2002). Recognition and visibility of LGBTQ issues and people was scarce prior to the Stonewall era of gay rights in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since that time, public awareness and discourse has increased. HIV and AIDS were prominent features of LGBTQ-related discourse in the 1980s. In the 1990s, and the ban on gay men and women from military service and adoption of the controversial “don’t ask don’t tell” policy were hotly contested issues. Same-sex marriage and civil unions for same-sex couples were also a key feature of public discourse in the nineties, an issue resurfacing
in the early 2000s, and that continues to this day in the form of legal, political and religious battles around same-sex marriage.

Between 2009 and 2011 when this research took place, public political discourse focused primarily on same-sex marriage. While the socio-political climate for LGBTQ populations varies greatly by region and across cultures within the United States and around the world, there have been significant gains in protection and rights and an increase in general visibility of LGB populations. While the quest to legalize same-sex marriage is often viewed as one of the more prevalent gay-rights issues of the time due to a confluence of factors, there were key LGBTQ-specific issues impacting queer youth as queer youth the emerged during this time as well. State and (school) district level battles around the place of extracurricular Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in public schools gained national attention, with most cases ending on the side of allowing GSAs in public schools. Emphasis on disproportionate rates of suicide in LGBT populations, often framed as being linked to gender or sexuality-based discrimination, heightened awareness of the effect of homophobia on young people. Coupled with an increased focus on school bullying more generally, Massachusetts responded by implementing anti-bullying legislation that explicitly recognized gender and sexuality-related issues. The political climate around transgender issues in Massachusetts, while not beyond reproach, is more positive and proactive than the vast majority of states in the U.S. In February of 2011, Governor Deval Patrick issued Executive Order no. 526 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression, which was explicitly framed and understood as a measure to prevent discrimination against transgender individuals. This order also classifies trans-related violence as
a hate crime, increasing the capacity of the commonwealth to collect violence data and making
the penalties for trans-related violence more severe.

These LGBTQ-affirmative policy changes have occurred at the same time public
discourses evidence the outright and more insidious forms of homo/bi/transphobia that continue
to be a salient feature of contemporary U.S. culture. A particularly relevant and widely
discussed example of this that occurred during data collection comes from a televised interview
with a congressperson on a Sunday morning television show featuring topics of political interest,
where an early contender in the Republican primary for the 2012 presidential election indicated
she would not call gay couples who adopt children a “family”\textsuperscript{11}. Other widely-discussed
incidents involving homophobic comments made by celebrities, and issues relating to the
homophobic culture of professional athletics captured attention of youth and adults alike due to
increasing levels of public attention to gay and lesbian issues, as well as more the speed of access
to information afforded by the internet as well as televisual media. The contradictory messages
around same-sex sexuality (and to a far lesser extent, transgender identities and issues) can best
be understood in a way that recognizes a state of change around LGBTQ issues, as opposed to
attempting to categorize the sum of public discourse as solely "good" or "bad" for LGBTQ
communities. A dichotomous way of thinking about LGBTQ issues fails to recognize the
complexity of the shifting nature of LGBTQ-rights, cultural climate, and the varied impact on
LGBTQ individuals and communities. As Russell (2002) points out,

\begin{quote}
whereas past generations grew up in a society that was silent about LGBT lives,
contemporary youth in the United States are growing up in a time when critical issues
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} Meet the Press, originally airing on MSNBC on August 14, 2011. Available online at:
that define citizenship are being shaped by increasing public awareness of—and at times hostility to—LGBT issues and people. (P. 258)

In sum, select issues pertaining specifically to LGBTQ rights and affirming of LGB identities are more prevalent in public discourse, yet the directly related backlash tempers the impact. Thus, the potentially positive effects of more media representations of LGB characters and people may be tempered by the largely stereotypic nature in which they are presented. Measurable effects of a negative and sometimes hostile social climate are evidenced in consistent and widespread disparities for LGBTQ populations, seen in inequalities in school and work settings, health disparities, and violent victimization.

School Climate

Queer youth and adolescents as a whole encounter what can be understood as an unwelcoming and often threatening school climate, to the detriment of educational outcomes for LGBTQ youth, and further posing a threat to the safety and well being of queer students. Results from the 2007 National School Climate Survey of 6,209 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 21, conclude that LGBT youth face what they term a "hostile" school climate. Among the many effects cited, LGBT youth exhibit higher rates of absenteeism than their heterosexual peers, with over 30 percent of LGBT students reporting missing school in the previous month because they felt unsafe, versus 5 percent of the general population of students (Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak 2008:37). LGBT students also report lower academic achievement and educational aspirations, due at least in part to concerns about safety, harassment and violence at school (Kosciw et al. 2008). The consistency of these findings coupled with their correlation to, for example, violent victimization and negative health outcomes, suggest that
education as a social institution, individual schools, and school climate are critical to understanding the social landscape of LGBTQ youth and adolescents, many of whom are students (Bontempo and D’Augelli 2002; GLSEN 2009; Russell, Franz, and Driscoll 2001).

Popular Culture and LGBTQ Visibility

Very much like political discourse around LGBTQ populations and issues, the visibility of LGB and to a lesser extent, transgender, individuals and characters in entertainment media has increased over the past several decades (GLAAD 2009). For many, the increase in visibility of same-sex sexuality is equated with social progress, as exemplified in the introduction to The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation’s (GLADD) 2009-2010 Network Responsibility Index (2009):

GLAAD has seen time and again how images of multi-dimensional gay and transgender people on television have the power to change public perceptions. The Pulse of Equality Survey...[reports that] among the 19% who reported that their feelings toward gay and lesbian people have become more favorable over the past 5 years, 34% cited “seeing gay or lesbian characters on television” as a contributing factor. (P. 3)

The effect of increased visibility of same-sex sexuality for gay, lesbian, and bisexual populations has consequently been framed in popular and academic discourses as “liberatory", although not unproblematically (Dow 2001). Coupled with the idea that a greater presence of gay and lesbian characters in entertainment media has the potential to change the perceptions of a largely heterosexist and homophobic culture is the implication that not only greater acceptance, but equality for LGBTQ populations will follow. Though it is likely queer adolescents benefit from the increased visibility of lesbian and gay characters and people, framing the beneficial effects as somehow liberating has the potential to obscure the very real effects of institutionalized
heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia, including symbolic and physical violence (GLSEN 2009; Kosciw et al. 2008).

Some media and cultural scholars have begun to question social processes that underlie the “mainstreaming” of gay and lesbian sexuality, often concluding that increased media visibility and targeted marketing to LGB populations does not necessarily correlate with equitable gains in social or political equality (Vaid 1995). In addition, the absence of representations of transgender, and LGBT characters of color, reflects the intersecting and enduring nature of institutionalized oppression in the contemporary United States. GLAAD (2009) reports,

despite the obvious dearth in representations of lesbians and bisexuals, the most glaringly underrepresented LGBT population on network TV (and TV in general) are transgender people, who were included in 1 percent of the LGBT-inclusive hours tracked this year, which works out to just 0.002 [percent] of the total hours of broadcast primetime programming [further.] while there were several primetime broadcast series that featured transgender storylines in single episodes, each one contained at least some degree of problematic content. (P. 5) 

*The "Mainstreaming" of LGB(TQ) Populations= Social Progress?*

The value of theories about the mainstreaming of LGB populations expands beyond the field of media and cultural studies. Scholars studying social problems within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities also engage with ideas about LGBTQ assimilation and the nature of systemic oppression. Girshick (2002), in her exploration of the “deafening silence” around woman-to-woman sexual violence in dominant rape narratives, utilizes Urvashi Vaid’s concept of “virtual equality” to explain the implications of a paradoxical “mainstreaming” of
same-sex sexuality that fails to recognize or rectify the added challenges faced by lesbian victims of female perpetrated violence. Drawing on insights offered by Vaid, Girshick (2002) writes,

The irony of gay and lesbian mainstreaming is that more than fifty years of active effort to challenge homophobia and heterosexism have yielded us [gays and lesbians] not freedom but "virtual equality", which simulates genuine civic equality but cannot transcend the simulation. In this state, gay and lesbian people possess some of the trappings of full equality but are denied all of its benefits. (P. 39)

The paradoxical and misleading notion that LGBTQ sexualities and gender are normalized elements of contemporary culture is important to recognize, as it is tempting to assume that representations of social acceptance (vis a vis visibility of same-sex sexuality in entertainment media) and select legal gains (e.g. the legalization of same-sex marriage in some states) means that structural and institutional oppressions have been eradicated. Research suggests just the opposite: queer adolescents are impacted in specific and significant ways by systemic oppression due to their identities. Thus, the multifaceted influence of heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia on the lives of many queer youth is not something that researchers can afford to overlook.

Familial Relationships and An Epidemic of Homelessness

A particularly relevant way heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia manifests in the lives of many queer youth pertains to familial relationships. The coming out process, and engaging in same-sex relationships or sexual behavior, can create problems for LGBTQ youth and impact family dynamics. LGBTQ adolescents experience a range of reactions from their families, with troubling or detrimental results including adolescents choosing to leaving home (a constrained choice due to non-acceptance or abuse) or being forced to leave home. In these cases, entry into the foster care or juvenile justice system, “couch surfing” or staying a friends’ houses, or
becoming homeless sometimes follow. Research reflects the magnitude of this reality for a number of LGBT youth: one study reports that approximately 50 percent of GLBT youth report negative reactions after coming out, and a full 26 percent report being physically kicked out of their homes (Ray 2006). It is well documented that homelessness disproportionately impacts sexual-minority youth (Corliss et al. 2011; Ray 2006). In a recent study of high school students in Massachusetts, 25 percent of lesbian and gay youth and 15 percent of bisexuals youth reported homelessness; a significantly higher proportion than the 3 percent of heterosexual adolescents reports of homelessness (Corliss et al. 2011:e4). In addition, homeless LGB (or sexual-minority) youth are at greater risk than homeless heterosexual counterparts for negative health outcomes and risk behaviors; including: mental health issues, engagement in survival sex, HIV risk, and increased substance use (Cochran et al. 2002; Gangamma et al. 2008; Marshal et al. 2009). Compounding the detrimental effects of heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia for sexual minority and transgender youth is the lack of protective factors often afforded by shared minority status many racial and ethnic minority youth have with parents and their family. Certain protective factors associated with resiliency among other minority groups may be lacking in queer populations; because, “in contrast to other minorities in which the adolescent has the same minority status as [their] parents, the LGBT adolescent may also have to deal with parents who reject...their child’s sexual orientation” (Levin 2011:18). Families play an influential role in health and wellness of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (Ryan et al. 2009). Violent, unsupportive, or even un-affirmative reactions from families or family members can
have a profound impact on an LGBTQ young person's sense of self, their identity development, and their mental health and physical safety.

*The Impact of Stress on LGBTQ Health*

Scholarship focusing on the specific ways minority stress impacts gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents has recently begun to emerge in sociological discourses, focusing on the relationship between SMS and mental health issues such as depression, suicidality, and anxiety; sexual risk behaviors; school performance; and the quality of intimate relationships; to name a few (Carvalho et al. 2011; Craig and Smith 2014; Frost and Meyer 2009; Kelleher 2009; Mohr and Daly 2008; Ryan et al. 2009). Some of these disparities have been directly linked to the unique social context of their lives, which are marked by non-traditional identities or expressions of gender and/or sexual minority status. In light of research documenting the negative impact of minority stress on the health, safety, and general functioning of LGBTQ adults and adolescents, identifying the dynamics and factors that contribute to minority stress in these populations is important for a more complete understanding of LGBTQ mental health in general, as well as intimate partner relationships and the relationship abuse specifically addressed in this study.

II. "WELCOME TO UNITE!": FINDINGS FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

"WELCOME! [UNITE's] mission is to create, sustain and advocate for programs, policies, and services for the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender youth community, particularly including the establishment of regular support meetings, and to defend and enhance the human and civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth..."  
(Description of UNITE from informational/promotional materials, 2010)
Conducting ethnographic research in the form of participant observation with adolescents currently living in the northeast, most of whom live in relatively close proximity to an urban area, illustrates not only the negotiations queer youth must make regarding their identity and interpersonal relationships on a daily basis, but provides valuable information about the conditions of their lives. This section presents on a subset of data collected over the course of a year about the purpose and meaning of a weekly social group for LGBTQ adolescents aged fourteen to twenty-two; highlighting the role of community, and the void a community like UNITE fills. The primary aim of this section is to contextualize broader questions relating to the factors, conditions, and/or dynamics that emerge as significant issues in the lives of queer youth. In addition, community connectedness and how it relates to things like social support are relevant to specific issues that pertain to relationship violence in queer adolescent communities.

This section provides insight into the significance and meaning(s) of the UNITE for youth participants, and in the process highlight the significance of having other LGBTQ people to connect with; a key finding reflected in interview and focus group data. A non-UNITE, interview participant describes the first time he walked down the street with three gay male friends by saying, "it was like a glow in my mind!". Data from ethnographic fieldwork at UNITE offers a glimpse into the lives of youth participating in a social-group with LGBTQ-identified peers, but it also functions to contextualize and deepen analysis of the themes that emerged from interview and focus group data. Perhaps one of the more important contributions it makes, is how it highlights what is missing in the lives of youth who are not connected to communities, who feel isolated, something that cannot easily be articulated. Ethnographic data
illustrate reported experiences in the outside lives of UNITE youth as well; pointing to things taken-for-granted by many people, like a general feeling of safety. While not all families can or do support their children (LGBTQ or not); supportive (or at the very least: non-violent) family situations are not taken for granted. Going to a school where teachers do not use words like "gay" or do not ignore peers' use of the word "gay" to mean stupid or dumb, is not taken for granted. Having a sense of community, a sense of solidarity and shared experiences, a place to feel accepted and safe, is what UNITE had to offer the youth who walked through its doors.

The Role and Significance of UNITE

"It was dark and very cold when I arrived at the church a half hour early. The door was locked so I waited outside. One of the UNITE youth arrived shortly afterward, and asked if I was here for the meeting. I said yes. He introduced himself and shook my hand. He asked if I was the presenter for the night and I said no, but I was new and starting a research project with the group. I asked if he was in school and he said he was a senior, and planning on going to community college after he graduated. Another youth arrived and the two hugged and began talking about the Grammys. They discussed a few musicians, and one asked the other if he saw Lady Gaga perform. The other said no, as his phone rang, with a Lady Gaga song as a ringtone. The first youth turned to me and said that usually there were people waiting outside, and he bet they went and grabbed something to eat until [the meeting started] because of the cold. Soon after, the door opened and one of the “adults” said “come on in!...”
At the meeting start-time there were about 15 youth walking around, varying ages, styles of dress, gender/sexual presentation. There was food set up on a folding table, lots of snack food: cookies, chips, candy, soda and water. There were also various pamphlets and information available on the table, along with a large container of condoms, dental dams, and other "safe-sex" materials. A few minutes later, a youth [advisor, I came to find out] announced the meeting was starting, and everyone moved to the circle of folding chairs and "check-in" began. During check-in, everyone present goes around and says their first name, age, preferred pronoun ("she", "he, his, him", "dude pronouns", "it doesn't matter", and "gender neutral pronouns, like 'ze'" were a few of the answers) and how their week had been going. The answers ranged from pretty specific to vague, and consisted of stories that seemed quite random at times. One young man said he had been getting really angry lately, and talked about that for a short time—but in a playful way almost—not 100 percent earnestly. Others said their week had been good. There were varying amounts of detail provided. One young woman said her week had been pretty bad, and she was close to tears, although she did not say why. No one pushed her to talk about it. Overall, the mood felt very positive, youth smiling and joking with one another...

... At the end of the meeting, we had "check-out" [how the meeting had gone] and everyone began to put the chairs away. UNITE participants were very friendly to both me, and other young people who were obviously new to the group. The inclusivity of the group was actively created- UNITE youth as a whole were proactive in efforts to make people feel welcome. As people began to leave, a few asked if I was coming back, saying ‘I hope to see you next week’. A few shook my hand, and one young man hugged me. It was not uncommon for them to hug each other--and the adult advisors--but I was caught off guard, so I just awkwardly put my arm around his waist- a half-sideways-hug. (Excerpts from fieldnotes, February 2010)

One of the first things I learned from UNITE participants was that UNITE is a special place. As someone "new" to the group, it did not seem to matter that I was not a true UNITE participant, but a researcher; although I was technically "participating" as I conducted research. As someone new to the group, I was welcomed warmly, as evidenced in excerpt above, taken directly from my fieldnotes. I was surprised about the "awkward" hug, particularly that it was extended by a youth participant to an almost complete stranger, but over the weeks and months of fieldwork it became clear that this and other expressions of welcoming and connection-building affection and
behaviors were a community norm, reflective of the value participants placed on affirmation and inclusion.

While youth likely came to UNITE for a variety of reasons, there were clear themes that emerged in the way youth described the role of UNITE in their lives. These themes are in direct dialogue with their experiences of being LGBTQ and young in other (non-UNITE) social and familial contexts, such as school and within a general society where LGBTQ people occupy a contested space. During the social times before and after the meetings, I had the opportunity to talk with many of the youth about what they like about UNITE, one of the first things I endeavored to learn was why youth initially came to UNITE, and if/why they returned. A common response was that UNITE is a place where everyone accepts you for who you are, no matter what. This theme, not only of acceptance, but of being accepted by everyone, no matter who you are, is important. The subtext of these types of comments speaks to the experience of rejection due to LGBTQ-identity or same-sex sexual behavior. Ethnographic fieldwork with UNITE participants was especially telling in this regard: there are places (perhaps many) where youth do not feel accepted, where they do not feel safe to be who they are.

The function of UNITE in providing a safe space, where one's LGBTQ identity is not denigrated, and not just tolerated, but affirmed, cannot be understated. Images 5 and 7 (pictured below) are two "testimonials" written by youth participants about UNITE during one of the activities that took place during a meeting. The messages imparted in these testimonials are not extraordinary, they reflect themes I heard again and again over the course of the year I spent getting to know UNITE participants and experiencing what it is like to be a part of the
organization. UNITE is a place where youth feel safe, where they can expect to be respected. Difference is often celebrated, with adult leaders and youth participants alike often offering affirmative comments in response to youth's decisions, choices and decisions, especially around self-expression (for example, an adult leader exclaiming, "that's so cool!" after noticing the drawings and messages written in marker completely covering the shoes of a youth participant). These themes of acceptance are exemplified in Image 5, where part of the youth's testimonial reads: "[UNITE is]... honestly one the only places...where EVERYONE accepts my gender identity...even my family doesn't call me what I believe to be my TRUE name". Youth are not just accepted and welcomed by words, but by the collective actions of participants in the group, evidenced by the practice mentioned here of using the youth's preferred name and pronoun, as opposed to the name assigned by their parents at birth, that the participant clearly feels does not appropriately reflect their gender identity.

Youth participants were so dedicated to UNITE and what it offered to them, as a community they sustained this culture. Over time, I saw how proactive youth members were, even members who were not officially designated as leaders in the group. Participants consistently engaged with one another in affirming and welcoming ways, and the dynamics of the group reflected shared respect, there was no clear social hierarchy. Of course, members grouped off at times; there were sometimes upwards of fifty participants at a meeting, and youth would generally gather in groups based on age-proximity, or with people they had developed long-standing friendships with during social activities, and some couples spent most of their time talking exclusively with each other. Generally speaking though, UNITE was a place where youth
came to develop friendships and "take a breath," as another participant puts it in their testimonial represented in Image 7. There was little evidence of intra-group conflicts among youth, this space seemed to truly offer a welcoming and safe haven for participants.

Although many of the youth in this study (not only UNITE youth, non-UNITE affiliated interview and focus group participants as well) explained that one of the main effects of isolation from LGBTQ communities was difficulty finding a person to date, it seemed that the primary role of UNITE for the majority of youth seemed to be about friendship and safety. The distinction between UNITE as a place to find community as opposed to being a place to find a partner was specifically mentioned on at least two occasions in my fieldnotes, although other indicators lend support to this observation. For example, early on in fieldwork, I engaged in a conversation with a small group of participants about UNITE in which the youth directly asserted that it was different from other queer-friendly spaces (specifically organizations like UNITE that exist in other regions of the state) in that it was not "a meat market". It was clear that some youth participants did meet the person they were dating, or came to UNITE with someone they were dating, but the way youth engaged with one another reflected their desire to cultivate an inclusive community.

Image 6, a picture taken of a chalk drawing a UNITE participant made in the parking area outside the meeting space reflects this vision, it reads: "walls turned sideways are bridges." The message here is clearly one of recognizing yet transcending the "walls" that can be created by difference, in favor of constructing "bridges" fostering connection. To provide an example of this in action: I watched a timid, new participant, who only weeks before came to UNITE for the
first time, notice a new, similarly-intimidated looking young person walk through the door, and turn away from chatting with their new friends over the snack table and welcome the stranger with a hug. UNITE is a very special place for many youth participants. It fills voids that exist in other parts of their lives. One of the functions of discussing this recurring theme, illustrative of the meaning and significance of UNITE, is to illustrate the need(s) that seemed to go unfilled before engagement with the group. It also reflects the recurring theme of isolation expressed by many non-UNITE affiliated participants in this study. The remainder of this chapter will provide greater insight into the nature and effect of these types of void, presenting analysis that highlights how identity-based stress, in conjunction with a lack of social support offered through community connections, manifest in the lives of many study participants. Emergent themes from ethnographic, interview and focus group data that offer a picture of the types of adverse social conditions that contribute to the chronic, identity-based stress encapsulated in theories of sexual minority stress, are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.
III. "WAS THIS REALLY WHO I WAS GOING TO BE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE?": INEQUALITY, IDENTITY, AND STRESS

Sexual Minority Stress

Virtually all participant narratives contained themes evidencing the presence of multiple forms and sources of stress in their lives. These stressors are sometimes hard to disentangle, at times many seem to operate simultaneously. This is apparent in Felicia's description of her first relationship experience,
Felicia: I went to a small liberal arts college that was really conservative, and the first relationship that I had with another woman, um, was...kind of a secret relationship, and it was incredibly difficult. Only one friend at the school knew, even though other people suspected it, I was even, bordering on like, homophobic myself because I was so scared of what was happening, and what my identity was, and was this really who I was going to be for the rest of my life... So it put a lot of stress on our relationship...there were times when I was harassed for it, and, I just didn’t even want to follow up or do anything about it, because I wanted it to go away, and not be talked about.

Felicia cites all three forms of sexual identity-related distress, including internalized homophobia and the desire to conceal her identity; the secrecy and fear prompted by perceived/expected judgment; and real experiences of harassment, as factors making her first ("secret") relationship "incredibly difficult". While not every narrative so clearly lays out the confluence of factors that often mitigate the relationships of LGBTQ adolescents, narratives in which multiple stress processes are present prove to be the norm. What follows is a more nuanced depiction of emergent themes relating to minority stress in LGBTQ adolescent relationship narratives.

*Prejudice-based events or conditions*. In youth narratives, actual experiences or stories of prejudice, discrimination, harassment and violence were not uncommon. These experiences and concerns ranged from incidents or conditions on structural and institutional levels (the lack of laws specifically protecting transgender populations from discrimination, school policies, etc.), to interpersonal level interactions with peers, family members, and even friends. According to Meyer (2003), the category of "prejudice-based events or conditions" is intended to capture actual, external, objective stressful events and conditions, either chronic or acute.

While only about half of the participants specifically cited schools as places in which incidents of discrimination or violence take place, formal and informal sanctions and norms seemed to create a context in which many of the youth felt marginalized. Youth discussing
positive to neutral experiences in regard to school climate were not uncommon. Sometimes separate from narratives about interpersonal relationships with peers; institutionalized homo/bi/transphobia in school settings emerge indirectly. Inhospitable or discriminatory experiences due to school policies, traditions and practices; the behavior of school personnel; and the omission of LGBTQ-related materials from school curricula were among things cited by participants. One youth describes, for example, failed efforts of their school's Gay-Straight Alliance to convince school administrators to incorporate same-sex issues into their health curriculum.

A more direct example of a prejudice-based event was recounted by Jayla. Jayla, a former student of an all-women's boarding school, clearly illustrates institutionalized transphobia. This takes the form of formal and informal negative sanctioning. It is institutionalized in school policy, supported by school personnel, and reflected in a hostile social climate perpetuated by peers. In response to a follow-up question about the school's involvement in students' personal lives, Jayla explains:

Jayla: There was this one girl in my school, freshman year she came out as gay, and then sophomore year she came out as trans, so she started wearing boys clothes, and it was pretty odd...the school was really upset about it, because she was really good at soccer, so she had to go to all these events and talk to alumni, but they were really angry that she decided to always wear men’s clothing and act a certain way, so they would punish her indirectly and give extra work, or study hall periods, or, if she went to sign up for an event, they would be like "oh well, we can only have a certain amount of people here". We kind of noticed that they were treating her differently.

In this case, it was not simply a lack of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, or unmet need around health-education; but actions so clearly prejudicial that other students recognized a pattern of negative sanctioning enacted by school personnel and overlooked or condoned by the institution.
This type of prejudice and symbolic violence in education settings was a less salient theme among participants attending college versus high school. Yet, participants attending college did occasionally mention school-related issues such as a lack of LGBTQ resources or an LGBTQ Center, and encounters with homophobic floor mates in residence halls.

The general lack affirmation for LGBTQ adolescents is one implications of marginalization, and likely has an effect on identity development among queer youth. Jayla's account of a rebuke from a peer whom she had been "talking to", exemplifies how a hostile school and cultural climate impacts youths ability to engage in normative developmental tasks of adolescence, including involvement in healthy romantic relationships. She explains,

Jayla: Sometimes you had to be careful, and I think that’s where the no commitment came into play, because you can’t get attached, especially because you couldn’t be out. I made the mistake one time, with this girl who I was talking to...[we were at the] school café, and I was like “hey,” and hugged her and she was fine with that, but it was that extended hug, and she was “wow, wow, wow…” Actually angry... [I remember] withholding certain things, like making sure that the emotional attachment wasn’t there.

She continues, "you’d hook up with someone, but you didn’t know the next day how to act. Or you would just be with them, and you’d be like, 'okay, so are we still friends, what’s going on? Do you feel the same way I feel about you?' But you could never know." This uncertainty, bolstered by school policies that facilitated the delegitimation of same-sex relationships, were a primary source of identity-based relationship stress for this young woman. On a larger scale, the school environment not only delegitimized, but effectively eliminated same-sex relationships through the cultivation of a culture where same-sex relationships or intimate encounters were not viewed as relationships at all.
Ursay's narrative points to a similar pattern around the impact of delegitimation and condemnation in relation to identity-based stress. Speaking to the influence of religious and cultural beliefs that condemn homosexuality, she explains,

Ursay: I mean, just from my group of friends, most people are either dealing with family issues or religion issues, and those weigh heavy on a lot of people, definitely. Because I know um, a lot of people just think like, they’re damned to hell. A lot of people feel that way but [do] not necessarily have that support system of having someone to tell them like, "you’re not going to hell"… Especially for someone who is, like, just finding themselves or just coming out, not having even just a few friends to turn to or talk to, or someone, to just, you know, call on the phone; that can definitely, you know, impact the way someone, I don’t know, impact their whole life.

Linking internalized homophobia with family and religious beliefs, she concludes that when cultures of hostility and condemnation go unchecked, they have the potential to "impact [someone's] whole life." This is a type of violence perpetrated by dominant culture, institutionalized in certain ways in certain religions and cultures, and supported on interpersonal levels through interactions with family and other community members, such as religious leaders or school personnel. In these ways, it is clear that not only concrete events such as bullying or discrimination have the potential to cause social stress. Systemic and institutionalized forms of prejudice and hostile social conditions have a clear, recognizable impact on the nature and extent of identity-related stress experienced by LGBTQ adolescents and young adults in relation to both romantic relationships and their lives in general.

**Real/perceived stigma.** Data that comprise the analytical category "stigma" were one of the most prominent features of youth narratives. Real or perceived stigma had a varied and widespread impact. Adolescents' concerns about people’s perceptions of their sexual orientation and gender identity/presentation took many forms. Although out at school, Caleb expressed
feeling "nervous" that "the wrong people" might find out he is bisexual. Another participant points out that one of the differences between queer and straight dating was that you could not just hold hands and walk down the street, clearly indicating stigma consciousness. Britt's narrative highlights this theme as well: she explains that she would never want to date someone who is "not out" because she does not want to have to deal with their paranoia. The fears these youth speak to (or speak against) are rooted in the same place: institutionalized heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia. Compelled by real or perceived and threats posed by a largely heterosexist and homo-bi-transphobic culture, queer adolescents sometimes feel compelled (either entirely; or in certain situations, around certain people) to keep their identities and relationships a secret.

*Identity-related stress: Identity Concealment.* Most of the youth reported concealing their identity and/or same-sex relationship in at least some environments, although few who participated in this study were completely or even mostly still concealing their identity in most aspects of their lives. In these narratives, issues of identity or relationship concealment were most commonly reported in relation to the family. As Britt puts it,

> Britt: I don’t care about other people, but life for me its mostly just my parents, because the biggest thing to me, is like, they control my life. So if I tell them, and then they’re not okay with it, I’m not allowed to see her [my girlfriend]. And then it’s like, well I wish I hadn’t done that. I could have just avoided that by not telling them…

While other youth in the study did not explicitly point out that parents often wield a great deal of power, this is often the case due to economic and other forms of support families are charged with providing for children and teenagers who are legal minors. Further, disproportionate rates of homelessness among queer adolescents indicate that the perception or worry that they may be rejected, kicked out, or otherwise mistreated by a parent or caregiver (sometimes resulting in a
constrained choice to leave home prematurely) is a legitimate concern (Corliss et al. 2011, Ray 2006). Importantly, the influence and significance of family did not seem to diminish in a substantial way for participants who were no longer living at home.

**New Forms of Sexual Minority Stress**

*Asserting identity and pride: A new form of identity-related stress.* While much less common than themes relating to keeping one's identity or relationship a secret, a number of adolescents spoke of stress associated with wanting their identity to be known. As Ursay explains, lacking access to LGBTQ communities means “you have to... [well, you] don’t have to go out there), but you have to put yourself out there to a certain extent.” While Ursay discusses the perceived need to come out in order to connect with other lesbian or bisexual women, other participants discussed the distress of being mistaken as straight. These participants suggest it is awkward, or "not fair" that they have to come out all the time, and view the heteronormative assumption of heterosexuality as an oppressive factor limiting their ability to live open and freely.

Further, romantic relationships are a significant developmental milestone of adolescence. For queer youth in particular, the desire to engage in a dating or sexual relationship may be further enhanced by hegemonic ideologies romanticizing dating and sex that are deeply embedded in a binary and heteronormative sex-gender system. Compounding these factors, cultural norms situate specific sexual identities (those identities “marked” by virtue of not being heterosexual) in a way that requires them to be labeled, demonstrated, defined or proven through
sexual behavior or romantic pairing. Thus, the added stress of having to come out as LGBTQ, even if not fearful or desiring to hide their identity, is a salient feature of identity-related stress.

_Heteronormativity: The erasure of same-sex sexuality._ Youth narratives indicate that the assumption of heterosexuality and the erasure of same-sex sexuality from popular, educational, and other discourses is another common source of stress. These dynamics are not adequately captured by measures that test for experiences of harassment or discrimination, sometimes referred to in the literature as "heterosexist experiences" (Kelleher 2009). While the argument could be made that heterosexism is the cause of the marginalization of same-sex relationships, sex and sexuality; the way "heterosexist experiences" have been defined and operationalized in mental health literature seem to emphasize discriminatory, prejudicial, or even violent experiences or encounters (Kelleher 2009; Kuyper and Vanwesenbeek 2011). A more nuanced analysis of the emergent descriptive codes suggest the concept of heteronormativity better represents this subset of stress-processes. Heteronormativity is a social condition where heterosexuality is assumed to be the norm. It conceptually departs from heterosexism in that it represents a cultural condition that is less overtly discriminatory and prejudicial, and thus less likely to be noticed. Most importantly, heterosexism and heteronormativity are experienced in different ways, and in a changing socio-political climate where queer identities and cultures appear to becoming more "mainstream", it is likely that heteronormativity will remain intact even as homo/bi/transphobia may appear to lessen. Because heteronormativity is less likely to be recognized as a significant factor due to the assumption that if there is not discrimination occurring there is less of a problem, minority stress frameworks which currently do not
adequately capture the effects of this dynamic are unable to provide insight into the nature and extent of its impact. Based on the qualitative data collected in this study, it is clear that marginalization and erasure from public discourse and subtle cultural messaging prove quite influential in the lives of queer youth. Thus, it is important include the concept of heteronormativity as an analytical category in minority stress frameworks.

Britt offers insight into the nature and effect of this theme, noting the effect of stress caused by having parents who are not necessarily intolerant, but in her words, "not supportive". She explains,

Britt: I think a lot of people who have families who aren’t intolerant and who are okay with it [their child's sexuality], but aren’t like, supporting and don’t, like, don’t say anything either way... can be equally difficult. Or almost as difficult. Because... it leaves people to feel like, uncomfortable, or, whatever, and I think that that’s what the substance abuse problems come from, and that’s what feeling uncomfortable everywhere else comes from, I think that it all goes back to your family.

Britt highlights how families that are "are okay with it" but not necessarily supportive can be experienced by youth in a way that causes identity-related stress, or as Britt puts it, where "feeling uncomfortable everywhere else comes from". The accompanying lack of identity affirmation is significant in terms of adolescent development as well, as adolescence is the time where identity-formation and a global sense of self-esteem are typically developed and achieved. Britt goes on to link this type of family situation to substance use as a means of coping with the discomfort. Also an example of the effects of heteronormativity, another participant expresses dismay and disbelief that a former high school teacher could talk about the Holocaust without mentioning the persecution of homosexuals. This form of marginalization, societal silence and erasure may not necessarily be intentionally prejudicial (or obvious), yet to many is still quite
impactful. Britt, for example, continues by explaining how the silence around same-sex relationships in society at large led her to feel as though it is a topic that should not be discussed, saying,

Britt: It’s kind of something that...you just hear about, but no one ever teaches you about it. I think it’s kind of the same as like, learning about sex. For a lot of people it’s like an unspoken thing...but then like you hear on the bus, or whatever...

Interviewer: So... do you think that influences what queer relationships are like for young people?

Britt: Um, yeah, I think so, because, I think that people almost, like I think that you end up feeling like it’s almost like a...like secret thing, like--oh I can’t talk about it, no one talks about it.

A direct result of silence around queer relationships is a feeling of uncertainty. Olivia links this to difficulty trying to find LGBTQ friends, saying "it’s hard to find people who are in lesbian relationships, because I don’t know if they are, and I don’t want someone to ask them, that would be weird." Participants discussed feeling uncertain about a lot of things due to social silence and heteronormativity. Olivia continues,

Olivia: It's kind of hard for me, and I haven’t figured it out yet [how to engage in same-sex romantic/sexual relationships]... when I was dating guys, there was always a point where it was like: “okay, we’re done!” But with girls, it’s…I don’t even know, when does it start? I don’t know when I would classify that as sex at all.

The silence around LGBTQ relationships in dominant society, and the influence of pervasive heteronormativity, clearly shape youth experiences and perceptions of relationships and same-sex sexual behavior. These examples reflect what Allen and Leventhal (1999) refer to as a lack of social scripts for relationships and sexuality; a dynamic they directly link to same-sex partner abuse. For example, it is reasonable to assume that not knowing what "counts" as sex for two
women may have the effect of creating uncertainty about what "counts" as rape between two women. A lack of social scripts (Allen and Leventhal 1999) or the alternate definitional dialogues (Giorgio 2002) that result from the confluence of heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homo/bi/transphobia, do in fact emerge as a major theme in youth relationship narratives. This will be explored further in the chapters that follow.

*Sexual (and Gender) Minority Stress: Including Transgender Youth*

It goes beyond the scope of the data to fully detail all the possible dynamics of gender-related stress in LGBTQ populations. This section will focus on exploratory findings from participant observation data and the handful of transgender/gender-queer youth who participated in one-on-one interviews do provide insight into the experience of queer and transgender young people. Emergent themes shed light on how stressors may be exacerbated for transgender/gender-queer adolescents of any sexual identity. For example, the participant quoted previously regarding her transgender friend's experience at an all-women's boarding school also discussed what she explained as a "traumatic" experience of the student being forced by their mother to wear a dress as a form of punishment, reminiscent of the struggles this same student was reported to have with school authorities around appropriate clothing for school events such as fundraisers. Institutionalized and individualized forms of discrimination and control are rooted in beliefs about a binary, mutually exclusive sex/gender system. This type of gender policing is predicated on a transgression of the sex/gender binary, and not necessarily even linked to sexual

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12 "Their" was used here instead of male or female pronouns, as typically transgender folks who identify as men prefer the pronoun "he", yet the respondent shifted between pronouns while recounting this story; so the most appropriate choice seemed to be to go with gender neutral language when not directly citing the interview participant.
minority identity. The intersection of sex, gender, and sexuality is important to recognize here, especially because as some transgender and gender non-conforming individuals may identify as heterosexual (or as LGB, or something else). Thus, research and theory that purports to address minority stress in "LGBTQ" populations requires specific attention to gender identity and expression, and exploration of the ways transgender populations may experience stress due to their identity. The tendency to overlook how transgender populations experience stress due to gender identity and expression by grouping them with sexual minority or LGB populations is reflected both in the name of the theory (sexual minority stress) as well as the lack of measures (or inclusion of non-relevant measures) in much scholarship on sexual minority stress to-date (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010).

Study data and existing scholarship support the assertion that there are clear distinctions between LGB and transgender experiences of stress. For example, while both sexual minority and transgender populations grapple with issues relating to the embodiment and negotiation of gender in relationships (with great variation even among LGB participants on the salience of "gender roles" in same-sex relationships) the challenges and extent to which LGB versus transgender participants exhibited distress around these issues was qualitatively different. For example, many transgender youth report an enduring stress relating to intimate relationships, particularly pertaining to questions about if, when and how to reveal to a potential or current romantic or sexual partner they are transgender. The threat of violence, or fear of prejudice rooted in widespread misunderstandings about transgender populations, while clearly a classifiable as a form of perceived stigma, is however a real possibility for transgender
individuals (Lev and Lev 2009) and represents an area where experiences of stress for LGB versus transgender populations diverge significantly.

Identity-related stress for transgender populations also needs to be understood within a social context where "LGBTQ communities" are not equally responsive to all sub-populations within the group. The sexism as well as the transphobia endemic in our larger culture is replicated in research on LGBTQ communities, as well as within LGBTQ communities themselves. An example of this is presented in the form of an issue a participant raised during an interview pertaining to concerns about the impact of having a transgender partner may be for an LGB individual. The participant wonders what might happen if someone has a partner who comes to know they are transgender, and decides to transition. They expressed concern that the non-transitioning partner may be resistant, or forced to question their own identity as a result. This reflects a divide in LGBTQ "communities", which most often also takes the form of marginalizing transgender sub-populations. During one of the rare occasions at UNITE where the discussion explicitly focused on transgender issues in a manner that resulted in transgender youth talking to one another about their feelings, the topic was if or when you tell your sexual partner or the person you are dating that you are transgender. In response, one of the youth indicated they had no idea. Another offered that sometimes you do not have to, but you just have to be careful they do not find out. As a participant-observer in this situation, I noted that I experienced these responses as insufficient: the first reflects the uncertain nature of the terrain for transgender intimate relationships; the second is both unsustainable for the long-term, and predicated on a troubling underlying assumption, that dishonesty and a lack of trust (as well as
an enduring fear of the person may find out and react in a hurtful or abusive way) is acceptable or a necessary concession for transgender individuals. Without any comment or suggestions offered by non-transgender attendees (including adult advisors and myself) there was a short period of silence and the topic moved onto something else. So, like cisgender-LGB populations, social isolation might also be an issue; yet a near complete lack of knowledge about gender non-conformity or non-cisgender gender identities may engender an even more pervasive sense of isolation. Further, the role of potentially protective LGBTQ-communities may be undermined by inequitable power relationships within them. Lastly, in the instance described above involving youth asking serious questions about a health and safety issue in a safe space, it is troubling that in the absence of adequate peer-to-peer educating, adult participants or leaders (myself included) did not or could not step in to offer more adequate suggestions or thoughts for consideration.

The issue of stress due to a lack of understanding is also illustrated in the testimonial written by the UNITE participant presented earlier in the chapter, who spoke about UNITE being one of the only places where people use the name they feel matches their gender identity. Zane, a gender-queer participant, also speaks to this issue. Ze remarks, "no one knows what gender-queer is, nobody asks. Nobody asks why I changed my name." This seems to be evidence of either a lack of knowledge, discomfort, or a lack of prioritization for those with more relative power (in the case of UNITE, cisgender gay men vs. transgender women or men, or cisgender lesbians versus transgender men or women, for that matter).
As alluded to in the anecdote about transgender youth at UNITE above, a recurring issue was a lack of trans-inclusivity in programming. This issue was most often raised by youth participants, either in "staff" meetings with youth leaders, or evidenced by suggestions anonymously submitted by participants about what they would like to do during UNITE time. There was also the occasional transphobic comment (although seemingly unintentional, in cases where the person was called to task for the comment, they usually apologized immediately). More commonly was the use of marginalizing language. Although, this was not always the case: typically health education presentations seemed to consciously replace words like "penis" or "vagina" with non-sex/gender specific words that conveyed the same meaning in terms of how to use barrier methods during sexual encounters, for example. The preferred pronoun question that each participant was asked to answer in the course of their introduction, every week, seemed to help youth use the appropriate pronoun, although there were slip-ups on occasion. Reports of transgender youth feeling marginalized is particularly interesting in the context of UNITE as an organization. UNITE tended to have a disproportionately high number of transgender-identifying youth attending weekly meetings. This very likely is a result of (and reflection of) the systemic marginalization of trans-identities and communities, even within "LGBTQ communities" and groups; paradoxically also reflecting the need for some form of community tie, even if marginalizing structural inequalities are replicated in community settings.

Unique forms and manifestations of stress may also arise for transgender individuals whose gender identity is opposite of the sex/gender traditionally assigned based on their anatomy at birth. It is likely that worries about others' questioning the legitimacy of their gender identity,
the stress of modifying one's body or being unable to modify one's body due to lack of resources or lack of medical technology, issues relating to school, the erasure of one's work or educational history due to name changes, or fear that people may find out they are transgender (if they pass as cisgender) are common (Grant et al. 2011). Two UNITE youth engaged in a telling conversation about their struggles and resistance to wearing gendered band uniforms and graduation attire, respectively. In one case, it seemed to be a parent who was blocking their child from wearing the attire they felt was gender-appropriate, in the other, the cause seemed to be school policy (possibly a lack of school policy around best-practices for transgender students).

The forms of stress listed above may not be recognized or accounted for in existing SMS frameworks. Further, even if they could be divided into existing analytic categories, it is likely that potentially important differences between transgender and LGB participants may be obscured. For transgender or gender non-conforming adolescents, issues relating to the legitimacy of their identity (the assumption of identity-related confusion); family, school or work control of expression through clothing; a relative lack of financial resources; limited access to mental and/or physical health care (due to parental interventions or economic factors); and a general lack of familial support may be especially salient.

During ethnographic fieldwork, I learned of two different youth (with very supportive friends) who initiated and put on fundraisers to help raise money for gender-affirming surgeries. Added stress for transgender youth under the age of eighteen around access to health care may occur if parents' exert control or pressure around health care access or decisions. One of the

13 The previously listed "stressors" are issues identified in available literature; some came up during fieldwork at UNITE, but limitations posed by the data allow only a presentation of anecdotal, exploratory findings here.
effects of a lack of access to satisfactory medical care was revealed in a conversation I engaged in with a youth participant pertaining to the free bleach kits available in the "Resource area" of UNITE. The kits contain materials needed to clean shared needles, a form of harm-reduction for people who use injectable drugs and who may otherwise not have a way to reduce the added risk of disease transmission (by using a new, clean needle, or their own). While bleach kits are a harm-reduction strategy that can be employed for any type of injectable drug use, a UNITE participant explained to me that they were not just for people who did "illegal" drugs, but for trans-youth whose only access to injectable hormone treatment is through the "shared" use of medication prescribed to a friend. Self-administered drug use and a lack of follow-up testing needed to ensure and maintain proper dosage are only two of the health-risks resulting from unmonitored self-medication. Health and health care is only one of the places where institutionalized transphobia and a culture of silence and misunderstanding around trans-issues is evident.

**Summary.** Access to material resources, supportive services, information, and education around LGBTQ-specific issues and needs are experienced uniquely by adolescents. Experience, legal and economic status, and influence of family and peers intersect with LGBTQ-status, resulting in "external social conditions" that range from situational and indirect to acute and chronic. Yet, cross-disciplinary research suggests the cumulative effect of the resulting stress is significant. The next section highlights emergent themes from data that speak to the nature of other "external social conditions" experienced by LGBTQ youth participants. While they do not call for additional changes to the general conceptual framework for sexual (and gender) minority
stress, they provide a detailed and nuanced view of issues and dynamics that shape the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence. The topics discussed below emerged from the data as significant in the lives of participants, and directly relate to findings discussed in subsequent chapters. Further, documenting these themes may be of use for future qualitative and quantitative research on minority stress among LGBTQ youth.

IV. "YOU'RE NOT HUMAN ANYMORE, YOU DON'T COUNT": ADDITIONAL FACTORS

Isolation

Most participants reported feeling isolated from other LGBTQ individuals and communities. This seems especially true for participants in high school, and those who reflected back on their high school experiences. UNITE participants were a notable exception. UNITE youth did report feelings of isolation outside of UNITE; for example, at school, or in conversations where they lamented the lack of a romantic partner because "the community is so small", but they did cite UNITE as filling some of the void. Interview and focus group data with adolescents in college (some of whom were only one or two months into their first semester) spoke about high school experiences marked by feelings of isolation and loneliness. Feelings of isolation was often linked to needing to hide one's identity from family—in conjunction with greater surveillance due to living in the same household as parents—or the lack of economic means to travel to locations where they believed they may find other queer people.

Many participants discussed bars and nightclubs as places to "find" LGBTQ communities or people. Bars were specifically identified as a key feature of queer dating culture, too. This
was true even for youth who had other types of community ties. For example, an interview participant who was also a member of UNITE noted he could not wait until he was eighteen and could get into the local club that caters to both the 21-plus and 18-21 crowds. While a number of college-aged participants who left home to attend school indicate feeling freer and as though there were more opportunities compared to their high school days, some reported continued limited contact with LGBTQ communities. Being under-21 years of age, and thus unable to legally get into bars, was often cited as a barrier. This was discussed as a source of stress and a contributing factor to feeling isolated both in terms of community and in relation to "finding" someone to date. Most participant narratives indicated significant challenges in accessing LGBTQ people or communities at one point or another in their lives.

Many youth explained the various ways isolation and a lack of community connection impact the functioning of relationships. These participants identify it as a challenge specific to LGBTQ youth. Zane voices the perception, for example, that for queer youth, the relative lack of potential dating partners “can make the need and desire… increase”. Heyes illustrates the enduring or long-term effects of this "need and desire", even if after you achieve the desired relationship, saying,

Heyes: [If] you find somebody, you just cling to them... because it is not often that you find someone that you really resonate with. But when you do it is sort of like, imperative that you hold on to them for as long as possible.

Many adolescents voiced a desire to be in a relationship (or to not be alone), that seemed to be compounded by fear and stress attributed to the perception that there are fewer potential partners for LGBTQ-folks. Thus staying in a relationship (of any quality) was often cited as preferable to
being alone; or, a way to mitigate the fear that they may be alone for an indeterminate amount of time. There are likely developmental implications, and implications for queer romantic relationships, if social conditions cultivate a culture where relationships are sustained (even in part) by fear.

*Family Relationships*

During the course of ethnographic research, I encountered youth experiencing the full range of responses from their parents upon coming out as LGBTQ. A few youth reported very positive outcomes, with one or both parents fully supporting their child(ren) and even going so far as to advocate for them and engage in community work (e.g. volunteering at UNITE, or starting a campaign to add “transgender” to the list of options for identifying oneself on Facebook, a popular social media site). A number of youth had yet to come out to one or both of their parents. This was sometimes attributed to fear, but other reasons were reported as well (e.g., their parents might not believe them, or they felt as though heterosexual youth do not need to come out—so why should they?). Some youth reported hurtful or verbally responses (e.g. homophobic remarks, parents questioning whether or not they were “really” gay, and asking questions like: “why are you doing this to us?”). There were also reports from youth who were kicked out of their homes and who ended up in foster care or group homes after becoming involved with the state agency that protects children and families. Others made a choice to leave home due to abusive or unbearable living situations that seem to have been exacerbated by their disclosure. As I collected ethnographic data, I encountered and heard about youth who actively avoided involvement with the protective agency for children in the state. Both youth and direct-
service providers from some LGBTQ youth-serving organizations reported that for some youth, being homeless was more desirable (safer) for LGBTQ youth than the environments fostered in group homes, shelters, or foster care. The young people I encountered who had experienced conflict around LGBTQ issues resulting in unstable living situations, often reported staying with friends or their partner, but these situations were often less than stable as well. The number of young people who reported tenuous or non-existent relationships with parents or other family is remarkable in the context of this research, given the initial emphasis on dating relationships and conflict. The recurring issues and topics pertaining to family life as it relates to intimate relationships among LGBTQ adolescents will be discussed in subsequent chapters, but is important to note here, as family is clearly a source of stress. This particular finding was one of the early indicators of a need to expand the scope of the study to recognize the critical nature of understanding the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence in qualitative research on dating culture, romantic relationships, and relationship violence.

In one of the focus groups, for example, Lexi expresses frustration, confusion and anger about how parents and other family members sometimes treat their children who come out as gay. She says,

Lexi: I mean like, everyone understands how to treat people nicely, like you don't call people up and say like, “you are going to hell, you are going to burn.” But I feel like one of the very few areas where people like, seem to forget all their humanity, is like, when their child or someone they know comes out as gay.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Lexi: ...they just don't even think, like, [the gay person is] still a person, because once they're gay, [it's like] “oh, you're not human any more, you don't count, you are sub-
human.” ... I cannot understand how people can just forget that no matter what someone is doing, how they are doing it, what they are, they are still a person.

Lexi is responding to a comment made by Yara, the other focus group participant, who mentioned her family's negative reaction when they found out she was a lesbian. (Yara subsequently reported moving among family members because of violent incidents with her mother and other experiences of family rejection.) The sentiment expressed by Lexi is a poignant example of the message familial rejection sends to queer youth. Often, it was not experienced as the expression of a family-member's religious beliefs, or ignorance--but instead experienced as personal rejection. Lexi's statement points to an underlying perception or feeling that some people view gay people as "sub-human." Voicing the belief that responding or interacting with LGBTQ children (or people) is one of "the very few areas where people... forget all their humanity" illustrates the impact this type of messaging (even if experienced second or third-hand) has for some LGBTQ youth.

The effects of familial rejection are far-reaching. While not openly discussed (at least with or around me), on several occasions I heard about youth who knew someone who was or had engaged in survival sex: the exchange of sex for shelter, food, or money for basic necessities. Survival sex may be an extreme result of familial rejection, but the consistent (yet multilayered) pattern in which family rejection was linked to ending up in unsafe situations, limiting access to resources, or otherwise impacting the health, education and general stability of youth's lives, was significant. Another example from fieldwork data takes the form of an electronic note posted to the public Facebook website for UNITE, referencing the large number of youth who attended a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by a UNITE-affiliated adult. This person
had opened their home to anyone who did not have a place to go for the holiday. Youth who attended were not necessarily homeless, but either had no place to go, or felt the desire to spend the Thanksgiving holiday someplace other than with family. This offers valuable insight into the connection for many youth between family issues, desire for community and love in the form of a romantic relationship, and the stress associated with LGBTQ adolescence.

_Cultural Ideologies_

Another consistent theme relates to hegemonic ideologies about gender and relationships, and the corresponding lack of role models—or social scripts—for queer relationships. When asked to discuss what qualities healthy versus an unhealthy queer relationships would have, a number of participants did not reference examples of same-sex or queer relationships (even fictional representations from popular culture) but instead described characteristics and dynamics of heterosexual relationships. While a few participants pointed to what they felt to be the strengths and weaknesses of their (heterosexual) parents’ relationships, others focused on the role of television and movies in their understanding of romantic dating relationships. Britt observes,

> Britt: I think that people want relationships to be like movies. I think that people, a lot of people, like my age or people that I know or am friends with, like, want their relationships to be the last romantic Nichols Sparks movie they saw... I think that that’s like a big thing, like, movies and TV. And going back to another question, I think that contributes to like, feeling like you’re not the ideal because the couples on TV are straight.

She not only references the desire to be in a fairy-tale like romance with heterosexuality and the corresponding heteronormative gender arrangements implied, but speaks to the effect of realizing that the absence of other representations means "you're not the ideal". The marginalizing effect
of cultural ideologies, plus the significance of a lack of relationship role models are both critical elements that shape LGBTQ adolescent perceptions and negotiations of relationships and relationship violence.

V. DISCUSSION

*Intersectionality and Minority Stress*

An intersectional lens allows insight into the way LGBTQ positionalities intersect with age in the lives of queer youth. Shifting cultural perceptions of LGBTQ populations impact the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence. Combined with emergent themes from youth narratives pertaining to identity-based stress, results indicate the need for an expanded framework for minority stress in LGBTQ populations. While not the initial primary focus, minority stress emerged as a foundational element of this study. This phenomena and experiences of identity-based minority stress can in part be interpreted using frameworks designed to study sexual minority stress. Meyer (1995) explains this as stress that "arises not only from negative events, but from the totality of the minority person's experience in dominant society... the center of this experience is the incongruence between the minority person's culture, needs, and experience, and social structures." (39). Yet, in their current form, sexual minority stress theories do not fully capture the experiences of queer youth in this study. Emergent themes point to dynamics and conditions that are not accounted for in current frameworks due to a changing social context and a lack of attention to transgender sub-populations in favor of the experiences of sexual minority groups.
Data point to the necessity of expanding this framework for research with LGBTQ populations in the contemporary U.S., beginning by recognizing the "T" and "Q" by expanding the name of the theory to *sexual and gender minority stress (SGMS)*. Adding "gender" differentiates between existing sexual minority stress frameworks and the expanded framework called for here (which study data provide just a foundation for); that accounts for the experiences of LGBTQ populations. The qualitative nature of this research offers three main insights that would increase the validity of minority stress frameworks for LGBTQ populations. First, a new analytic category, *heteronormativity*, would account for experiences rooted in social ideologies that are not exactly homo-bi-transphobic, but continue to indicate heterosexual relationships are the ideal type. The concept of heteronormativity reflects changing social conditions, an environment that not always violent or hostile to LGBTQ issues, but simply silent--where same-sex relationships are purported to be "the same" as heterosexual relationships--yet continue to occupy a marginalized position. Second, the conceptualization (and measures used to assess) the existing "identity-related stress" category must be broadened to account for stress resulting from *pride in one's identity*, as opposed to the current sole focus on shame and stigma. Stress resulting from pride (e.g. wanting one's true identity to be known or affirmed) emerged alongside themes reflective stress due to shame and stigma (e.g. needing or wanting to conceal one's LGBTQ-identity). Third, perhaps the most broad change, is that frameworks *must account for gender*. This is particularly important in regard to addressing the marginalization and absence of transgender and genderqueer experiences. However, stress and stigma relating to gender expression in LGB populations may be an area that could benefit from additional research.
Research that includes both sexual minority (gay, lesbian, and bisexual) participants and transgender/gender-queer participants (LGBTQ research) must be aware of and responsive to transgender populations.

_Pride: A new form of identity related stress._ In SMS frameworks, identity-related distress is often conceptualized in terms of concealment versus disclosure of minority status (Kelleher 2009; Kuyper and Vanwesenbeek 2011; Meyer 2003) and/or expression of a negative self-concept (Meyer 2003). However, emergent themes from this analysis suggest a possible new form of sexual identity distress that also operates on the individual/interpersonal level: stress associated with wanting or needing to assert or prove one's identity. This is markedly different from most conceptualizations of SMS that explicitly frame individual-level, identity-based stressors being rooted in needing, wanting, or trying to keep their identity a secret (Kelleher 2009; Kuyper and Vanwesenbeek 2011; Meyer 2003).

_Heteronormativity._ Heteronormativity is defined as the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural, normal way of being in the world. While a common concept in feminist and sociological discourses, this concept has not yet been integrated into health and violence scholarship. The concept of heteronormativity is complimentary to the overall theoretical tenets of SMS, which account for the impact of adverse social conditions, ranging from macro (exposure to prejudice based events) to micro (internalized homo/bi/transphobia). Heteronormativity proves to be salient in adolescents' descriptions of dating relationships, culture, and violence, and will be explored at length in the chapters that follow.
Including "gender-related stress" and transgender populations. Sexual minority stress frameworks are sometimes used in research with LGBTQ populations. Yet the validity of current conceptualizations and measures intended to assess trans-related stress is undermined because transgender populations are mainly stigmatized because they confound the sex/gender binary. A foundational assumption of SMS theories is that same-sex sexuality or behavior as the root cause of stigma, yet people who are transgender (just like men and women who are cisgender) may be heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, or any other sexual orientation or identity. Further, the measures created, tested, and employed to assess components of sexual minority stress are not relevant to some transgender populations; for example, internalized homophobia (IH) scales do not address the experiences of transgender people who are heterosexual.

Relatedly, other prominent stress processes that relate to gender (or transgender) issues are not recognized, an issue compounded by the lack of qualitative and quantitative data establishing the nature and extent of identity-related stress among transgender/gender non-conforming populations. Another factor is that the current socio-political climate is much more tolerant/aware of LGB individuals and same-sex sexuality than it is of transgender populations and ambiguities relating to sex and gender. Frameworks for SGMS must identify and create measures for sex/gender-related stress so as not to marginalize or conflate trans-issues with sexuality-based dynamics.
Also relevant to research conducted specifically with queer young people, it is necessary to recognize the role of age, particularly in the context of adolescent development. Assumptions about teenagers, the seriousness of teenage relationships, limitations posed by being a legal minor, dependence on family, the economic concerns faced by youth who are separated from their families, geographic and/or other forms of isolation (e.g. rejection by peers at school) are significant issues in LGBTQ adolescents lives. Age, in this sense, is not only important because queer youth engage in relationships within a unique set of social circumstances, but because adolescence is a stage in life where important developmental tasks are achieved, specifically relating to interpersonal attachments (friendships and romantic relations) as well as identity development (Collins 2003; Crosnoe and Johnson 2011; Diamond 2003; Furman and Shaffer 2003).

Further, heteronormative social ideologies that impart the message that heterosexuality is the natural and default sexuality, seem to impact identity development of non-heterosexual youth in both direct and indirect ways. Sexual identities that depart from normative heterosexuality require action, often in the form of romantic or sexual relationships with an individual of the same-sex, in order to be viewed as legitimate (or more than a passing phase). This is complicated for youth whose family or community are not accepting of their attraction, identity, and sexual behavior or gender performance. The developmentally and socially significant accomplishment of identity, both the security of the individual in themselves, as well as the related acceptance
and affirmation of this aspect of identity from significant others and society at large, is vital to individual adjustment and development (Collins et al. 2009; Wyndol and Shaffer 2003).

Specifically relating to dating and relationships, having a sense of security in one's identity is important to the development and implementation of appropriate physical and emotional boundaries (Collins et al. 2009; Furman and Shaffer 2003). Knowing one's identity, for queer youth, requires action in the face of structural, interpersonal, and individual barriers. Youth who are in the situation of coming to "know" a possibly non-heterosexual identity, or who are managing or struggling with gender identity during adolescence are thus more vulnerable than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. Similarly, LGB adolescents who have accepted, but feel compelled to prove or assert their identity by engaging in various forms of intimate relationships, are pursuing and engaging in romantic and intimate relationships under a unique set of circumstances. The possible effects of this are important to consider.

Engaging in romantic relationships is considered a normative task of adolescence, as is the role of romantic relationships in identity formation. However, the stress and stigma associated with LGBTQ-identities and same-sex sexuality/sexual behavior elevates both the risks posed by relationships, and the risk-factors that impact relationships (e.g. the need or desire for secrecy resulting from homo/bi/transphobia). These factors are important to recognize and examine as early relationship experiences have long-term effects on mental health, as well as the functioning of future relationships (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012).

Implications for LGBTQ Adolescent Relationships and Dating Violence

Some of the social conditions and dynamics identified in this chapter may seem only
indirectly related to dating relationships, dating culture, and dating or sexual violence. Yet, the very premise of this chapter is a direct result of emergent themes from youth narratives calling attention to the social and psychological factors that contextualize dating relationships. However, a number of risk behaviors and adverse outcomes identified in SMS research were identified by youth as mitigating factors in dating relationships and relationship conflicts. For example, violence and victimization correlate with health risks such as substance abuse and suicidality (Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002; Gangamma et al. 2008; Garofalo et al 2006). Disagreements or attempts to control a partners' substance use was a mentioned by a number of youth; as one participant notes, “I don’t know if they don’t exist, or if I live on some strange planet, but I don’t know a lesbian that does not either smoke, drink, smoke weed, or...a combination of the three”. Therefore, examination of the interrelationship between stress, dating violence, and risk behaviors promoted by oppressive social conditions would likely be fruitful. Social inequalities and the resulting minority stress, especially as it intersects with age, impact relationships indirectly through their influence on the context in which they operate. At the same time, many of these dynamics also have a direct link to relationship functioning, and the following chapters will illustrate the nature and extent of their influence on youths' perceptions and negotiation of relationships, as well as dating conflicts and violence.

VI. CONCLUSION
This chapter provides the contextual foundation necessary to question the meaning of dating and relationships for queer adolescents, their perceptions of queer dating culture, and ultimately the way they conceptualize and negotiate conflict and abuse in these relationships. Gaining perspective into the social landscape of queer youth's lives lays out key issues and dynamics—especially the link between power inequalities in society and individual life experiences— that allow us to better understand relationships, conflict and violence within populations that occupy multiple-minority statuses. Queer adolescent narratives point to individual-level experiences with identity-related issues that are the result of deeply-rooted structural inequalities. These include institutional and symbolic violence, as well as interpersonal violence. Relationships between queer youth and their families, partners, and friends; the role of dominant and queer cultures; and social institutions like schools, politics, government, the media, and religion were salient features of youth narratives.

Results highlight the need for researchers to question the validity of existing conceptualizations of sexual minority stress frameworks for research with LGBTQ youth, and ultimately provide for an expanded framework. Insights from intersectionality theory, combined with emergent themes reflective of changing social conditions and differences in experiences between LGB and transgender populations lay the groundwork for such an expansion. This chapter offered heteronormativity as a new analytic theme, identified a new way to conceptualize identity-based stress, and highlighted the need for attention to trans-specific issues as a starting point for a more inclusive theory. Referred to as "sexual and gender minority stress", subsequent chapters will employ concepts from the expanded framework outlined above.
On a broader level, this chapter establishes that structural inequalities and minority stress intersect with developmental issues relating to adolescence in LGBTQ youth populations. In particular, stress plays a prominent role in the lives of queer adolescents, raising questions about the impact of social stress and oppression on queer romantic relationships (as well as conflict and violence) during adolescence. Thus, a grounded theoretical approach to this topic produces questions such as: How does minority stress impact youth's dating experiences? What other factors mediate youths' engagement with queer dating culture...and their ability to address interpersonal violence? The next chapter focuses specifically on queer youths' perceptions of intimate relationships and queer dating culture, with key findings pointing to the social, cultural, and interpersonal dynamics that make LGBTQ dating culture unique. A significant amount of what makes this culture unique can be traced back to structural inequalities and experiences of SGMS. The next chapter also functions as a bridge between results presented here on SGMS and social context with results presented in chapter six about youth's perceptions and negotiations of dating conflicts and violence.
CHAPTER 5: QUEER YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING CULTURE

This chapter presents the subset of results centralizing LGBTQ adolescent experiences and perceptions of queer dating culture and relationships. It expands on key findings from chapter four, specifically linking the ubiquity of sexual and gender minority stress (SGMS) and a cultural climate marked by social inequalities, to experiences with and perspectives on LGBTQ adolescent dating relationships and culture. An intersectional lens focuses attention on the interplay of individual experiences and structural inequalities occurring at the intersections of gender, sexuality and age. Life course perspectives and theories of adolescent development provide key insights that build the foundation for the final set of findings on queer adolescent dating abuse that are presented in the next chapter. Results are organized into two sections, with the first section presenting an analysis of trends in the way queer youth discuss dating and relationships. The second section focuses on the interplay of queer adolescent relationships and social-psychological development.

The idea that queer relationships "are exactly the same [as heterosexual relationships], but different" was a common way youth participants began to talk about queer dating relationships and culture. This provides the impetus for deconstructing how queer youth talk about dating relationships. Broad topics covered here include relationship dynamics, challenges and barriers, and ideals and expectations. The majority of the content in this section can be
understood as it relates to SGMS; youth suggest queer relationships are more stressful than those of their heterosexual peers, because of stigma, a lack of social scripts for dating, pressure to have a "good" relationship, and limited options for dating partners. They also indicate there may be dynamics specific to LGBTQ adolescent relationships themselves, these include the perceptions that they move faster and are more intense/serious, and that they are often marked by some degree of secrecy or isolation. The second part of the chapter will focus on the interplay of adolescent development and queer romantic relationships. Particular attention is focused on the significance youth place on dating, sexual and intimate relationships; the perceived effects of delayed dating (due to isolation, stigma, or fear of consequences), and the impact of romantic relationships on identity development and self-esteem. Both the effects of inequitable social conditions that create minority stress, as well as the significance of age and adolescent development, are pertinent to the central research question pertaining to LGBTQ dating abuse. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of this set of findings for the subset of results presented in chapter six.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

For LGBTQ youth navigating their first relationships and in the midst of the developmental task of identity establishment, the way gender intersects with sex and sexuality creates a unique social context. Queer youth populations are systemically marginalized, evidenced by the range of inequitable social conditions that can be seen in the legal realm all the way to representations in
popular and consumer culture. Further, youth oftentimes lack institutional support because of laws, policies, school rules, and barriers faced by social service agencies working with minors. LGBTQ youth are also in the unique position of being in the process of developing an autonomous identity and engaging in key developmental tasks of adolescence. Combined with interpersonal dynamics unique to some queer youth (such as a lack of familial support) and the impact of sexual and gender minority stress; the impact of romantic relationships on psycho-social development (and vice versa) engages with scholarly discourses and contextualizes findings on queer adolescent dating conflicts and violence.

**Romantic Relationships and Adolescent Development**

Due to the significance of romantic relationships for healthy psycho-social development (Collins 2003; Collins et al. 2009; Furman and Shaffer 2003) research on adolescent dating violence must be attentive to not only the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescent dating relationships, but developmental factors as well. While necessarily contextually-contingent and individually-specific, it has been established that for (cisgender heterosexual) adolescents, romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence are influenced by family and peer relationships, function to support or inhibit the normative developmental tasks occurring during adolescence, and impact general health and psycho-social development (Furman and Shaffer 2003). Some of these tasks include: identity and sexual development, the transformation of family relationships, the development of close peer relationships, and educational achievement (Furman and Shaffer 2003).
While scholarship on adolescent development and romantic relationships has dramatically increased over the past decade, the primary focus has been on heterosexual relationships (Collins et al. 2009). While the processes of individual and social development may be similar for heterosexual and queer youth, there is a gap in empirical literature on developmental trajectories among LGBTQ adolescents (what may be the same or different in relation to their heterosexual, cisgender peers) (Furman and Shaffer 2003). Varying experiences due to the social context of heterosexism and homo/bi/trans-phobia that mark the daily lives of many queer youth support the presupposition that there may be differences due to sexuality and/or transgender identity. In addition, queer youth may have different dating experiences and opportunities, and interactions with peers. As Furman (2002) notes, "many sexual-minority youths date other-sex peers; such experiences can help them clarify their sexual orientation or disguise it from others" (178). This experience of having to "clarify" and potentially "disguise" their orientation/identity is unique to LGBTQ youth. Sociological research such as this, that explores the nature and social context of queer adolescent relationships, and focuses on dating violence, is a timely, valuable, and much-needed addition to existing literature.

*Sexual Minority Stress*

The previous chapter demonstrates that sexual (and gender) minority stress is pervasive in the lives of the queer youth in this study. Evidence firmly grounds minority stress as a mediating factor in health, safety, well-being, and achievement for LGB (and likely transgender) youth. Perhaps most significantly, minority stress has been linked to health issues directly related to violence, such as sexual coercion (Kuyper and Vanwesenbeek 2011) and risk
behaviors such as unprotected sexual intercourse (Ryan et al. 2009). Combined with evidence that minority stress impacts mental health and the quality of intimate relationships among adult same-sex couples, it is likely that minority stress impacts adolescent same-sex couples as well as transgender youth and their romantic and sexual relationships (Carvalho et al. 2011; Frost and Meyer 2009; Mohr and Daly 2008). It is important to recognize the possible significance of sexual and gender minority stress for queer romantic relationships and adolescent development as this is an under-researched and under-theorized area of study. This chapter offers qualitative data that may help identify unique manifestations of minority stress in the context of LGBTQ romantic relationships and dating culture.

*At the Intersections of Sexuality, Gender and Age*

*Lack of social scripts and inexperience.* One issue that may arise at the intersection of LGBTQ and adolescent positionalities relates to the absence of examples of healthy relationships involving LGBTQ people. The heteronormative nature of social scripts for romantic relationships, and developmental issues such as dating and relationship inexperience, also emerge as factors. A lack of social scripts and positive representations of queer relationships (Allen and Leventhal 1999) in conjunction with possibly delays in engaging in intimate relationships that match their identity or attraction may play an important role in the development and quality of romantic relationships among queer youth

*[Heteronormative] cultural discourses of romantic love.* While predominantly presented in the context of heterosexual couples, queer youth are not immune to hegemonic discourses of romance, which include:
The notions of love at first sight, love as blind, love as magical, love as able to solve all relationship problems (as long as there is enough of it), and the idea that the stresses of courtship will go away as soon as marriage takes place. In a context of romanticism, partners are encouraged to attribute negative interaction to external force—to overlook, forgive, or ignore negativity and conflict as atypical. (Lloyd and Emery 1999:27)

Heteronormative ideologies about romantic love and gendered conflict together reinforce notions of an inherent inequity in romantic relationships. This has serious effects. For example, dominant discourses of aggression may function to silence women because they lack an appropriate vocabulary to voice their experiences (Lloyd and Emery 1999). This may be equally problematic for queer youth who may lack not only an appropriate vocabulary to articulate experiences with violence, but an appropriate vocabulary about relationships in and of themselves. It is plausible that inexperience with dating, a lack of social scripts, pervasive heteronormativity, and romanticized cultural ideologies about love, play an interconnected role in queer adolescents' perceptions, expectations, and negotiations of dating relationships and violence.

*Peers and the social pressures of dating.* One of the primary differences between adult and adolescent dating relationships is the central role of peers. Adelman and Hea Kil (2007) point out that “romances are at once privatized…yet, in practice, are conducted in the public square of school” and for adolescents, “friends are involved in, influence, and can be affected by the lives of dating couples” (1309, 1297). Mulford and Giordano (2008) support the idea that friends are a central part of teenage dating relationships, as well as relationship conflicts, suggesting

conflict over how much time is spent with each other versus with friends, jealousies
Heterosexual adolescent dating violence research also specifies that jealousy of time spent with friends, as well as with peers of the opposite sex, is an important component of teen dating violence. For lesbian, gay and/or bisexual youth, it is plausible that jealousies around time spent with friends or other peers (both same- and different-sex) may manifest in different ways. While gender may not be the most significant factor for queer youth (or one that easily reflects the dynamics of typically gendered patterns), social pressure is likely a salient factor.

The role of peer groups during adolescence is undoubtedly significant for all youth, regardless of their sexual or gender identity, although exploring possible differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual adolescents’ friendships and interactions with peers may prove relevant to this research. While there seems to be a finite amount of research on the topic, one study focusing on relationship patterns of heterosexual and queer adolescents during early and late adolescence suggests dynamics of friend-relationships and networks may vary among heterosexual and sexual-minority youth (Diamond and Lucas 2004). Further, differences in perceived levels of sexuality-related support, from sexual-minority versus non-sexual-minority friends, may also be significant (Doty et al. 2010). The generally hostile climate of many schools across the nation is a factor that cannot be overlooked in discussions of queer adolescent peer relationships (GLSEN 2009; Russell et al. 2001). Ueno (2005) finds that homosexual and bisexual youth experience more problems with their parents and peers in school, in addition to lacking protective social ties with other homosexual or bisexual youth. Ueno (2005) ultimately
finds this has a negative impact on mental health and interpersonal relationships. It is likely that for some LGBTQ adolescents, the development of a queer identity will involve communicating to friends, family, in school settings, etc. about an identity that deviates from what is considered normative. Thus, for queer adolescent populations in particular, it is possible there are unique peer dynamics impacting adolescent dating relationships that have yet to be examined.

*Shifting role of family and peers in queer adolescent development.* It also seems plausible that some queer adolescents have had to cultivate and rely on informal support networks composed of friends and peers, or lack sufficient support networks, due to the inadequacy of structural support. Thus, friend-relationships in particular may serve as an important protective factor for some queer youth. Alternately, it is possible that friend-relationships may function as informal support networks in certain situations by not others, such as when facing harassment at school versus situations involving dating violence where friends feel split loyalty because both partners share the same network of friends.

Recent research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth perceptions of support indicate that for LGB youth, sexual-minority friends provide the most support around sexuality stressors, whereas family and heterosexual friends provide less support for sexuality stress than for other stressors (Doty et al. 2010). This speaks to a condition related to the social location of queer adolescents. For some minority communities, the family is a place where individual family members can come together and find strength and refuge from dominant society. Many queer youths' immediate family members are not LGBTQ-identified, and levels of support around gender/sexual-minority status varies significantly. Additionally, most LGBTQ adolescents must
rely on their families to meet their basic needs, so even a perceived threat of homo/bi/transphobia in family of origin may limit youth’s willingness to communicate about problems in dating relationships.

The nature of the relationship between individual queer adolescents and the larger LGBTQ culture or community, in all probability varies significantly. Thus, the level of protection afforded by community affiliation as well as the salience of “community norms,” such as a culture of silence around LGBTQ battering (Allen and Leventhal 1999), is not a dynamic that remains fixed across LGBTQ communities. While cultural discourses imply LGBTQ adolescents seek out and join queer communities when they come out, it is probable that some LGBTQ youth feel disconnected from queer communities, disconnected from their non-queer communities or cultures, or may not have access to (or interest in) LGBTQ communities at all. As a result, queer youth are socialized into community norms, such as silence around intimate partner violence, to different degrees. This is not to suggest that community norms around dating relationships and violence are less important for queer youth than for queer adults, but instead, that existing norms and trends may shift in form and importance both over time and among different queer populations.

Due to developmental factors such as dating inexperience, as well as the general marginalization of queer individuals, bodies, and identities that permeates our culture and social institutions, it is possible that many queer youth may replicate heterosexual relationship patterns in their relationships. While there is some indication that the replication of heterosexual relationship patterns creates relationships imbued with power inequalities (Allen and Leventhal
research on heterosexual teen dating violence suggests that adolescent relationships may lack the traditional elements associated with unequal power dynamics (Mulford and Giordano 2008). Because it is unknown what effect (if any) this may have for queer adolescent dating relationships and violence, it seems prudent to leave room for emerging and undefined dynamics in any research or theory pertaining to this population. However, the lack of attention to the specific social context of queer adolescent dating relationships in scholarly literature poses significant limitations for our ability to comprehensively discuss this population’s experiences with dating conflict and dating abuse. If we do not recognize or understand the key features of queer romantic relationships among youth, or the effects of minority stress and structural inequalities on queer dating culture more generally--our ability to discuss their conceptualization and responses to conflict and violence that occurs within their relationships and those of their friends is compromised.

II. "IT’S PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING... JUST BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE NOT AS NORMALLY ACCEPTED BY SOCIETY": QUEER ADOLESCENT DATING

This section identifies thematic trends in the ways queer youth describe dating relationships: relationship dynamics, challenges or barriers, and ideals and expectations. The majority of the content in this section can be understood in relation to the conditions that create sexual and gender minority stress. Participants reported queer relationships were more stressful than those of their heterosexual peers. They cited stigma, a lack of social scripts for dating, pressure to have a "good" relationship, and limited options for dating partners. This section also highlights dynamics youth pointed to as specifically unique to the functioning and progression of the
relationships themselves; namely, they move faster, are more intense/serious, and often marked by some degree of isolation or secrecy.

*Queer Adolescent Relationships: The Same, But Different*

The most common way LGBTQ youth began to talk about queer relationships was by asserting that they were essentially the same, but different, from heterosexual relationships. While this statement is simultaneously informative and vague, its importance is highlighted by the number of youth who started out by saying something to this effect. In a study centralizing the experiences of LGBTQ youth and queer dating relationships, the fact that most youth began by comparing queer relationships to the dominant reference group\(^{14}\) can be read in a variety of ways. Queer relationships may in fact look like heterosexual relationships in some ways, but may look different in others. Or, youth may lack access to the language, or access to social scripts, that allow them to talk about queer relationships. Above all else, it brings to the forefront the social context within which this research takes place: a culture where heteronormativity is so pervasive, that LGBTQ youth, in a study about queer relationships, often began describing queer dating and culture by measuring and comparing it to heterosexual or straight dating and relationships. For example, Eli speaks of "the two worlds", saying,

Eli: It’s just completely different—in a way

Interviewer: Yeah, can you explain that a little bit more?

Eli: Um.... I’d say like, how we interact with each other... straight couples, I’d say...they’re kind of slower paced...LGBT relationship(s) [are] faster. A month is like a year, three months is somebody’s two years; it’s just how fast things go sometimes... When it comes to like, holding hands and everything else...little things I think are different, what separates them... We’re more free, in a way, because we know how hard it

\(^{14}\) The initial prompt was a question to the effect of: "What are your thoughts about queer dating and relationships?"
is to struggle with something... So their relationships are a little more different, they can make out in public. Which is, I’d say it’s kinda gross to do that, but they can [and] not get...the cops called on them ... I think that’s awful, but that’s what happens... we have to keep it really discreet with certain things.

Eli's report that "they are completely different... in a way" is contradicted by a closely followed assertion that everything is "pretty much the same." He asserts that relationships are much faster, and the "little things" that separate them include the need to be discreet in public due to fear of violence, as well as the notion that LGBT[Q] relationships are actually more free because queer individuals have experienced "struggle". The inherently contradictory nature of this response was actually quite common, including the general reasons he offered as to how queer relationships differed from heterosexual relationships. For example, Quin also began by responding to the question: "Will you talk a little bit about what queer dating is like?" by saying "Um, [it's] exactly the same thing as in the heterosexual...community". He continues by qualifying his statement, noting "I think like, the only difference is -- or the only thing that is unique to like, the queer scene is maybe the ways...people have to meet." Another example of this assertion of sameness marked by difference comes from Zane, who notes,

Zane: As far as relationships themselves, I guess, it’s the same as anyone else really--it’s just two people who have feelings for each other, love each other, like each other... It’s pretty much the same thing, just between two people not as normally accepted by society. So the only thing I think would be different or unique is possible harassment, possible misunderstanding.

Youth participants recognize that one of the main factors that made queer relationships different from the relationships of their heterosexual, cisgender, adolescent peers is inequality. This social context, the environment in which sexual and gender minority stress is possible, emerges throughout youth narratives--evident in their discussions of isolation and relationships marked by
some degree of secrecy; the lack of formalized education, social scripts, and relationship role models; real or perceived stigma, fear, and the effects of internalized homo/bi/transphobia on self-esteem; and pressure to appear to have a good relationship to combat prejudice and stereotypes.

*Lack of dating partners.* One of the main differences between queer adolescent relationships and cisgender, heterosexual relationships is neatly summed up by Britt, who explains, "the big difference is that there are... fewer people". Participants recognize there are fewer LGBTQ people, which seems to be exacerbated by the isolation may queer youth feel due to the insular nature of their worlds (especially true for younger participants) which are often limited by geographic location and specific spaces such as school, work, and the immediate community they live in. The significance of there being fewer options for dating partners is rooted in a strong desire to be in a romantic relationship. This desire is likely informed by cultural norms around romantic relationships, an insight Zane offers when ze notes, “[people in] our society nowadays, just seem to have like, this like, perception that they need to be in a relationship, and that goes for anyone--gay, straight, bi, pansexual, whatever. People just a lot of times think they need a relationship to be happy”. Here, Zane voices the perception that there is pressure to be in a relationship for all people, not just queer youth. However, ze prefaces this comment by observing that for queer youth, it is possible the relative lack of potential dating partners “can make the need and desire...[for] a relationship increase”. Drew points to the combined effects of this, saying “not a lot of people are queer, so like, when you come across someone else who is...that might be your first attraction to the person”. The perceived lack of
dating partners, as well as social pressure to be in a relationship, play a central role in youth narratives. Similar to Drew, Ursay elaborates on the impact these factors have on the trajectory of queer relationships, saying “it’s not a community that is all around you...[so people are] kind of unsure about the future... [and] willing to stay longer, or settle for whatever they have because of that”. One of the implications of there being fewer options for dating partners is that queer youth may make certain compromises, such as "settling for whatever they have"; this is discussed further in the next chapter as it has implications for youth's negotiations of relationship conflicts and violence. There are other implications cited by youth as well though, one of them being the idea that queer relationships move faster, or are more intense, than straight relationships.

*Relationships move faster.* The perception that queer relationships among adolescents are accelerated was another common theme. The excerpt from Eli's narrative in the previous section also touches on this, and he later asserts that "everything" moves faster, specifically emphasizing emotional intimacy, but also mentioning sexual behavior. Jayla begins by suggesting that there is a perception that dating is "instantaneous, because the community...is so small" saying that make it feel like "oh my god, I'm [finally] meeting someone else! Okay, let's date!" but as she's about to say what "actually" happens, she reconsider, saying,

Jayla: That’s what people think, but in reality... actually, I would say, I guess it is a little expedited. You meet someone, and you’re like “heeeey…”. It’s still a process of getting to know people...but that’s definitely the pressure here, because you know, [it's like] "oh crap, there’s only thirty-two other people here who are potential date[ing] partners,” versus if you were straight, you’d be like: “okay, there are thousands”.

Jayla reaches a similar conclusion as Ursay and others, explaining "so you think about that, and you’re like, 'I knew she likes cats, and I don’t really like cats, but we can move past that, past certain things, and it’ll be okay'". The link between dating being "instantaneous" or "a little expedited" and the lack of potential partners is important to recognize, as is the idea that youth may be willing to settle.

Drew, discussing the fast pace of gay male relationships in particular, points to age, romanticized notions of love (being in love with the idea of love) and sexual attraction as potential causes of the faster progression of intimate and romantic relationships, explaining that "[teenagers] either rush into a relationship and don’t really get to know the person they’re with...[or make] it to home plate and then a couple weeks later, they’re broken up". He continues, it's “...either because of lust...[and] they are attracted to the person [or] they’re in love with the idea of being with somebody and not so much...who the person actually is." This speaks to the role culture and the romanticization of relationships, another theme present in youth narratives.

*Relationships are more intense.* A separate but related theme that falls into the same category of relationship-specific dynamics is the idea that queer relationships are not only more serious than straight relationships, but a lot more intense. As Felicia explains,

Felicia: LGBTQ dating is a lot more intense than straight dating... there’s a lot of pressure once you find someone to stay with them, because the circles are smaller... there’s so much stigma...you kind of have to stick together and if ... there’s some kind of breakup then you lose your whole circle. You lose your friends, and the person that you’re closest to.
While many of the participants voiced some variation of these two themes: queer relationships move faster and/or are more intense; there was not a core theme that linked their explanations as to why. One of the more common explanations seemed to relate to the idea that there are fewer dating partners. A fair number of participants cite some type of reason that can be linked back to sexual and gender minority stress (e.g. stigma; fear or prejudice, discrimination, or even violence inflicted by society or others). In some narratives, it seems as though youth do not really know how to articulate why relationships move faster and/or are more intense, whereas in others the reasons provided seem loosely linked, or are based on stereotypes (e.g. on why queer relationships are more emotionally intense, a cisgender lesbian explains that women are more emotional, whereas a cisgender gay men explains that gay men like drama).

Further, while these findings may imply LGBTQ youth relationships can be characterized as having stronger connections, more emotional intimacy and greater resiliency than heterosexual relationships, many observations offered by youth undermine this assumption. For example, Drew notes the basis for some teenage relationships is lust, or that "being queer" might be your first attraction to your partner, as opposed to other qualities or characteristics like shared interests, values or beliefs. Differences in two partners' expectations for the relationship, and a disjuncture between what youth report wanting (e.g. a relationship, in a general sense) and what they feel that have to settle for (e.g. shorter sexually-based encounters, dealing with a partner's love of cats) due to the risk of having nothing, are two of the main themes relating to the root source of problems in queer adolescent relationships. This is not to say queer adolescents as a whole do not have healthy, well-functioning relationships; many reported having satisfying
relationships either currently or in the past. At the same time, these issues in relationship trajectories and functioning are important to recognize as they were prevalent in youth's narratives and have significant consequences. The next section focuses on the role of uncertainty and a lack of social scripts and role models for queer youth.

Lack of Social Scripts for Dating

Another salient theme that emerged from the youths’ discussions of queer dating culture and dating relationships was the lack of social scripts; which directly relates to sub-themes of a lack of role models and formalized education about queer relationships. Also, a typical strategy when talking about ideas about queer relationships was to describe characteristics and dynamics culled from examples of heterosexual relationships. For example, Seth speaks to the direct effect of a lack of social scripts on the sexual and emotional progression of gay male relationships, saying,

Seth: I’ve met a lot of people and on the second date they’re like, “Oh, you’ve changed my life”. I just feel like there’s no kind of model for them. And like, even on TV there’s very few queer couples and so they have nothing to base it on. So they are like, “Oh, well I guess this is when I should say that,” like “This is when I should do that” and it’s not always the case.

As illustrated in Seth’s assessment of the utility of heterosexual relationship models however, there were significant limitations of relying on heterosexual role models or education geared towards different-gender relationships as a strategy for learning how to engage in queer relationships. The results presented in chapter four, as well as findings discussed in the next chapter, explain how a lack of social scripts relate to both minority stress and relationship violence, offering a full picture of how the "lack of social scripts" theme is situated in youth
narratives. The primary emphasis of the sections that follow will be themes relating to the ways youth learn how to navigate queer relationships in a context marked by structural inequalities. The lack of available role models or social scripts for LGBTQ relationships is a direct result of heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homo/bi/transphobia in dominant society. While examining specific themes from youth narratives, this section also speaks to bigger issues around the relationship between queer adolescents' individual experiences, structural oppression, and institutionalized inequalities.

Reliance on heterosexual relationship models. Many of the youth referred at least once to a heterosexual relationship to explain ideas they had about queer or LGBTQ relationships. While a few participants referenced what they felt to be the strengths and weaknesses of their (heterosexual) parents’ relationships, others focused on the role of television and movies. While quite common to rely on heterosexual examples, youth rarely offered any type of qualification or caveat, which aligns with the idea that gender and gender differences may not be as important as other factors in youth conceptualizations of queer relationships. For example, Olivia replies to the question of where she got her ideas about what a "good" same-sex relationship looks like by saying

Olivia: Ahh…I guess, it would be from my parents. They have a very different relationship: they communicate very well, most of the time, and I think they’re a good example of what a relationship should be. It’s really good! I’ve realized over the years I guess, that not all families are like that, so I’m really grateful.

While most youth do not mention gender differences (either between their parents or on the larger level gender/sexuality differences between heterosexual and same-sex or queer relationships) it can be assumed that there are some gender dynamics occurring within the
families of LGBTQ youth that reflect dominant ideologies. Thus, how those (unarticulated) elements may influence youths' ideas about gender dynamics in both different-gender and same-sex relationships is an important element to take under consideration. Britt's explanation of how she "act[s] in relationships" speaks to the process of socialization occurring in families with heterosexual parents and a LGBTQ child,

Britt: Um, I guess that I think that my family made me how I am, and that determines how I act in relationships. I mean, my parents are the people that I learned how... I mean not learned how to have a relationship from, but they’re the model that I have, so I guess like, I don’t consciously do what they do, but I think that I default to what they do because it’s what I know. But, I don’t think like, I act differently [because] like, "oh my family...". It’s just kind of like I was raised by them so I mostly act the way they act.

Like many participants, Britt does not voice the possibility that sexuality or gender dynamics may be different in same-sex/queer relationships; or that LGBTQ relationships may be viewed or perceived in a different way, or that social conditions may impact LGBTQ relationship functioning. She does point to such differences during other points of the interview, but the direct reference to a heterosexual model without qualification exemplifies a trend in youth narratives that merits attention. The social context in which LGBTQ relationships take place, as well as the resulting impact on the individuals and relationships themselves, seem to influence the utility of modeling dating behavior after heterosexual parents (or other heterosexual role models). While this pattern seems to support the assertion made by most youth at the start of their interviews, that queer relationships are essentially the same as non-queer relationships, it does not help explain the "differences" that were the predominant focus. It does explain the uncertainty and ambiguity that seemed intrinsic to the way youth negotiated or sought to explain experiences with queer relationships, however. In seeking to assert "sameness" with non-
LGBTQ populations, and in the absence of definitional dialogues (Giorgio 2002) for queer relationships, power differentials are obscured in two significant ways. First, the relationship between gender difference, structural power, and power differentials in relationships between cisgender women and men are not recognized, and second, power differentials in same-sex relationships (where gender can't be cited as a basis for inequality) can't be explained. Therefore, examining themes relating to youth's socialization in heterosexual families, as well as their reliance on heterosexual relationship models, highlights how significant it is that youth do not have relationship role models that help them learn what is appropriate and what is not in their own relationships.

Examples of healthy queer relationships. Out of 23 youth, only three referenced a specific example of a healthy same-sex relationship they knew existed between real people (people they actually knew or knew of, as opposed to television or movie characters), and even in these cases the discussions of these couples were extremely limited. Jayla, for example, notes that while she mostly hangs out with freshman and sophomores, she has noticed examples of healthy gay relationships on campus, explaining,

Jayla: I know upperclassmen that have really strong relationships: “he’s been my boyfriend for two years,” and it’s been nice to see that. They walk around campus, and you’re like: “aw, that’s so sweet.” You want that. I definitely see my good friend’s... Marcus, he is [an upper-classman], but still... he has a boyfriend of three years, and it’s definitely a relationship, it’s not one of those in-between things, what’s-going-on things, but definitely, you know, his mom came to visit and she brought food, and this is so sweet, and this is the relationship that you want to see more often, instead of the random hooking-up thing.
Caleb references his gay uncles relationship, although this too is limited to a few sentences and does not yield much substantive content. Further, he immediately follows up with the assertion that television is actually where "a lot" of his ideas about relationships come from. He explains,

Caleb: I don’t talk to my uncle much... but it looks like a nice relationship. I mean, the kind of relationship where they are close but they don’t have to be next to each other, they can roam around. They can go to a party and not have to be together all the time. But so close enough that they can share the same bed, or house, and so forth.

Interviewer: Where do you think you developed your idea of what a good queer relationship would look like?

Caleb: I don’t know I watch too much TV. So that’s probably a lot of where it came from. Also, there’s like, book-type romance, and things like that. Guy meets guy or a guy meets girl or whatever, and they, just something clicks. That’s probably where a lot of it comes from, the media.

In this instance, Caleb switches from talking about a gay relationship between two cisgender men who are members of his family, to ideas presented on screen and fictional books where "guy meets guy or guy meets girl... [and] something clicks". There seems to be no difference between the gay and straight idealized romance in Caleb's rendering. The third participant who spoke about specific examples of LGBTQ people in relationships, notes that while he had seen many same-sex relationships growing up because he had lesbian aunts. Yet, as opposed to talking about the qualities/characteristics of healthy or unhealthy relationships, he offers a memory of attending a dinner party where he got the sense that same-sex couples were essentially "playing house". His (retrospective) analysis of this event led to the conclusion that the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationships undermined their attempts to have relationships that were "the same" as heterosexual relationships. While other participants noted experiences with family
members who were gay, or other examples of LGBTQ people, they did not reference them directly in discussing where their ideas about queer relationships came from.

*Formal education about relationships.* The effects of a lack of social scripts and relationship role models for queer youth are supported by a lack of formalized education about healthy queer dating relationships, healthy relationships or dating violence in general—often discussed by participants in relation to education in school settings. While parents are rarely discussed in the context of educating their children about queer relationships, Britt points out that oftentimes parents just do not talk about being gay or straight, saying “it’s something that you just kind of like, hear somewhere, and... figure the rest out.” She later identifies a lack of education or acknowledgement of LGBTQ issues at school to be one of the biggest issues queer youth of today come up against.

Eli more specifically addresses the problematic nature of silence in schools around LGBTQ health and well-being, saying,

Eli: Definitely schools now don’t have the right education for health and they definitely need to because kids need to know now what they’re dealing with because they, relationship wise, because they don’t really have a direction, and what the risks, and what they’re looking for, isn’t like, key factors of you know, being in an abusive relationship, or, the difference of categorizing it, when they see abusive relationship they see physical, that’s probably all they know. I didn’t know that until I started UNITE, you know, the different kinds of abusive relationships. It’s definitely the kind of thing that needs to be talked about more in schools.

This participant discusses the opinion that schools do not offer the right kind of health education, and it wasn't until he started attending the community organization that he received information that made him feel more confident that he knew what "the different kinds of abusive relationships" are. Similarly, Zane points to the significant role of UNITE in zir knowledge
construction, saying "I wouldn’t know half the things I know about the community in general or like, relationships, if I didn’t go to UNITE."

Of the interview and focus group participants who were not involved with UNITE (amounting to a total of fifteen out of twenty-three) none reported any type of involvement with a community-based organization before they entered college. A number of these participants spoke of having little, if any, formal involvement with LGBTQ social or support groups. Of those who did, their involvement ranged from significant to marginal (attending a one-time social gathering like a dance to being involved in weekly on-campus meetings of a campus PRIDE group). Thus, reliance on queer-focused community groups as sources of information (while helpful for those who did have consistent contact) school settings would have a much broader effect in terms of reaching LGBTQ youth. Unfortunately, the majority of all focus group and interview participants reported that their schools had limited (i.e. a presentation during one class-session, for one day) to no education about healthy relationships and dating; and of those that did, only one reported remembering the specific inclusion of materials that seemed inclusive of LGB(TQ) relationships.

The role of UNITE in strengthening the knowledge base for some members of the interview and focus group sample was significant. But there were even limitations to that, as one UNITE participant (not an interview or focus group participant in this study) explained to me during fieldwork. Directly commenting about my research, she notes that while it is good to have LGBTQ-identified, adult role models like me and the other adults involved with the organization, yet it was not like they actually ever saw us with our partners. She mentioned that
they might hear us talk about our partners from time to time (to say what we did over the weekend, for example) but her comment illustrates that an unmet need remains. The periodic peer-education that occurred at UNITE around relationship issues did address some of the unfulfilled educational needs (at the very least, these discussions served to legitimize queer relationships). But issues pertaining to a lack of relationship role models (or depictions of actual relationships in dominant culture) were not addressed through UNITE. This speaks to the interconnected nature of a lack of role models, lack of education and the lack of social scripts that are so significant in the results of this study. It illustrates how the institutionalized nature of heteronormativity cannot be undone by changing one dynamic, like offering education about relationships in queer community settings. While the supplementary role of the community-based organization centralized in this study is important to note, it raises important questions about access to information, education and resources around healthy relationships. Access to organizations or other forms of queer-focused support or resources is limited, even in a state that allocates funding for community-based programs like UNITE to provide health education. However, even in these settings, some youth do not feel they have access to the tools they need to navigate the real-world of dating and relationships.

Sources of informal education: Internet and media representations. In the absence of formalized education about healthy relationships, specifically healthy same-sex or queer relationships, youth have few other avenues through which to gain information. Attempting to solicit information from a parent did not seem to even be an option for consideration for most. Outside of community-based groups like UNITE and the "real-life" examples of (mainly)
heterosexual relationships discussed above, the remaining sources of information for youth about queer relationships were entertainment media, the internet, or experience (their own or that of a friend). Some participants were more critical than others of the messages they could take from the media about queer relationships. One young gay male focus group participant notes a feeling of inauthenticity in his reliance on social scripts provided through the media, saying "I always like, feel like I'm trying to...act out a role", continuing by explaining that he still doesn't "really know what to do all the time...". Another example of "mediated" information about queer relationships comes from Seth, in response to the question "how do you think that you learned about dating relationships? Was it just through experience?"

Seth: Yeah. I had no clue what I was doing the first time. It’s probably experience and...when you talk to people like they’ll [say whatever on the internet]. Kind of like there’s not limits. People talk about whatever and sometimes it’s very offensive but it’s kind of maybe good that it’s so open. So you kind of do learn a lot.

Interviewer: Like what?

Seth: I was using the internet since middle school and I would ask questions and just learn all about my body and different things.

Seth talks about learning a lot, but his answer combines the issues of learning about dating and learning about his body. So while the internet is a source of information available to many queer youth, this begs the question, what do youth learn about queer relationships on the internet? It is clear that mainstream media representations and dominant social ideologies about romantic relationships are embedded in idealized notions of (heterosexual) pairings, but it has been suggested that the internet may be a site to counter hegemony and offer a variety of views and diverse sources of information. In Seth's narrative, however, he specifically points to a lack of
boundaries, evaluated here as "kind of maybe good" because you learn a lot. Yet earlier in the interview he mentioned the troubles he's encountered in relationships that move artificially fast--reflective of a lack of appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries for relationships due to what he suggests is a lack of social scripts for dating. Later Seth continues by pointing to the negative experiences he's had meeting people on the internet, noting that it's not uncommon to be "used" for either sex or conversation, and then ignored. The nature of the findings in this study relating to the use of the internet to learn about LGBTQ relationships, or to connect with other LGBTQ-identified people or communities, do not lead to any clear conclusions.

Britt is critical of media representations, and speaks to the effect of a lack of representations of LGBTQ couples on television; combined with her experiences with her family, lead her to the conclusion that you're not supposed to talk about queer relationships because they are abnormal or wrong. Reed has a different point of view, saying that representations of gay people are "definitely all over the media", but then cites the harmful nature of stereotypic imaging, saying,

Reed: I think that growing up as a gay person, the people you see reflected in the media are generally promiscuous, and they go to clubs and they do drugs and they live a particular urban young lifestyle, and so, I wonder to what extent the media contributes to the socialization of young gay men, but it has to play some kind of role, if you expect your life to be like that when you get older.

This speculation about the possible impact of media portrayals on gay men (specifically stereotypical portrayals) was echoed by another gay male focus group participant. He specifically relates this to messages about gay male relationships, saying:

FG2: Like, a lot of [heterosexual] people can watch The O.C. and be like, "Oh my God, The O.C., those people are dating" but like, for all of gay culture, it's like, "these people
are having sex in the back of a club"... it's either like you are always a slut, or you are just going to be alone forever.

*Heteronormativity and the "role" of gender.* Looking back to one of the first quotes in this section indicating that queer relationships are same, except for the fact that they are between people "not as normally accepted by society," it is interesting to consider the idea that the most apparent reason those relationships are "not as normally accepted by society" is because they are between two people who outwardly present or are read as the same gender. This speaks to the dominant cultural ideologies that require specifically gendered bodies to occupy opposite yet complimentary places in romantic or intimate relationships. Yet, gender is not centralized in youth's discussions of what makes queer relationships the same or different from heterosexual relationships; most youth spoke instead to a larger social context of homo/bi/transphobia or heteronormativity. These are significant elements of the general social context described in the previous chapter. An example reflective of the effect of heteronormative social messaging on youth's specific language and descriptions is evident in Eli's narrative. He relies on a heteronormative, romanticized, yet strikingly gender-less explanation for why he prefers dating bisexual men,

Eli: I am very open-minded...and bisexual men happen to be [different from] gay men... some [whom] are either very preppy and closed-minded. Very closed-minded. And some are just very slutty... and I don't like that.

Interviewer: Yeah...

Eli: Because ...I am very monogamous, I don't like hooking up with people, I just don't like that whole thing and I don't agree with it because of how I operate.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Why don't you agree with it?
Eli: Oh, because of -- because it's kind of like, I was brought up -- because I am very, like I said, old school.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Eli: Like, romantic. I'm a hopeless romantic, like, I like -- you know, date, you know, you pay for it if you ask and if the other person... or go equally, something like that, and if you're with someone you should be monogamous not polyamorous with them.

This example of what constitutes "old school" is clearly informed by a pattern that is gendered at its core, rooted in historic and social dynamics which position men as economic providers, as well as the party with more control. Further, it is perpetuated in contemporary discourses of romantic love, monogamy, and the idea of tradition--all of which are gendered in a specifically patterned way. Yet these elements or their implications are not alluded to in his discussion.

The reality for many cisgender and some gender non-conforming or transgender participants is that the gender of the person they are attracted to (or date) either (1) matches their own, or (2) is not "standard" in that it somehow deviates from the binary organization of our sex/gender/sexuality system. While in many cases the gendered aspect of these discussions is absent, made clear through the basic lack of language used to evoke ideas that reference gender (like, "gender", "boy/girl", "woman/man" etc.) there are examples in the narratives where gender emerges as a more clear element of the heteronormativity that shapes youth discourse and experience. This is evident in instances where youth talk about external pressure-real or perceived, to date someone of a different gender; or the negotiation of language (for example, Jayla's explanation as to why she finds herself using gender-neutral pronouns at home, with her parents) to create an illusion of ambiguous or different-gender partnering.
When gender was focused on more explicitly, the ways youth talked about it in relation to romantic relationships and dating were varied and inconsistent. Like in the example with Eli, there were several instances where gender-based ideologies were framed as differences due to sexuality, not gender. While some cisgender gay men talked about negotiating gender-based stereotypes about gay masculinity, they too were framed as stereotypes about gay men, and not tensions pertaining to gender. A much smaller number of cisgender lesbian or bisexual women, in comparison, spoke of gender roles or tensions, although because of sample limitations, any trends relating specifically to differences among sub-groups must be viewed as exploratory findings for the purpose of informing future research. A few participants noted that a lack of adherence to some type of gender-based system was confusing at times, but this seemed like a peripheral concern when compared to the time and emphasis spent discussing issues such as a lack of potential dating partners.

In the context of studying queer dating conflicts and violence; it seems important to note that queer youth in this sample did not explicitly voice the expectation or perception that same-sex relationships mirror heterosexual relationships in terms of gender roles and the accompany power differentials reflective of systemic gender oppression. When focusing more specifically on the possibility or presence of violence or abuse in a relationship, participants were more likely to assert that sex/gender/gender expression may have a place in the discussion, although these assertions also lacked a definitive set of themes. Yet, gender is by default a significant element of this study due to the focus on intimate partner violence; one of the few explicitly gendered forms of interpersonal violence and a topic where gender figures heavily in the predominant theoretical
approaches to the topic. Thus, even a lack of clear gender discourses may be a significant finding, and is the reason the "finding" that gender was discussed inconsistently is included here.

Experience versus Expectations

It seems that many youth report wanting a certain kind of relationship, but feel unable to have one due to a variety of factors. Some have been discussed already, such as a lack of access to other queer youth. But others point to larger issues within queer youth communities that speak to developmental issues, or poor coping strategies like the use of substances to deal with minority stress. Other participants voiced concerns that they are unable to have a healthy relationship due to a partner's low self-esteem or other issues relating to mental health. Alternately, a gap in experience level between themselves and their potential partner was a significant source of trouble. Still others exhibit idealized notions of relationships, which lead to unrealistic expectations about having a "perfect" partner or relationship. Britt speaks to this idea in chapter four, when she suggests that a lot of people want their relationships to be perfect, like in the movies. An excerpt from Caleb's interview, a participant who indicates he's never been in a relationship, illustrates a direct example of the application of romanticized notions on relationship expectations:

Interviewer: So, what do you think you’ve taken away about what it’s like to be in a relationship, from seeing all the different people?

Caleb: It looks really nice, it looks like it’s the happiest thing possible. Like, maybe what heaven would feel like, it seems.

The romanticism Lloyd and Emery (1999) point to in heterosexual adolescent relationships through their discussion of the discourse of romance, is also prevalent in many parts of queer
adolescents' discussions of romantic relationships and portrayal of what they are looking for in a relationship. However, there is some indication this may change over time, at least in part a result of gaining relationship experience. As a young cisgender gay male focus group participant notes, "I watched [Queer as Folk] and I watched like, Brian and Justin's relationship [a gay male couple on the show] and I was like, “Oh, that looks wonderful because they love each other then they can go off and speak with different people and come back to each other at the end of the day. Um, that's -- I have never had a relationship like that happen." A disjuncture between real life experiences and an idealized notion of relationships is very clear here.

The common theme reflective of the ways youth's narratives indicated the idealization of romantic relationships co-existed with evidence that many of the same participants were more savvy than some of their comments suggest. Most participants were asked to describe what a healthy relationship looked like, or asked to talk about characteristics an ideal relationship would have. Gabri, for example, provides a very measured response, saying,

Gabri: If partners are just like there for each other and they help each other and they don’t, like, try to control each other.

Interviewer: How do you think jealousy, and stuff like that, fits in?

Gabri: Um, I mean, I think it can be normal to be jealous, but you just have to--not like, take it to the extreme I guess, and like talk about it with someone if it gets really bad.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gabri: Or like, talk to your partner about why you’re jealous about something.

Offering a "solution" to when an issue such as jealousy becomes extreme (talking with someone, or talking with your partner) is a direct way to address a relationship problem. Further, situating
jealousy as a possibly normal thing to occur in relationships suggests a departure from a romanticized view of relationships where everything is "perfect". Another example comes from Zane, who suggests that you don't have to be perfect to be in a relationship, but you can't expect the relationship to heal anything. This too is representative of more realistic and mature view of relationships expressed by some participants. Zane says,

Zane: Um, I don’t mean that in order to be in a relationship in the first place, you have to be like...true to yourself and everything--I think that like, we’re all still figuring things out. Especially like, not really especially, but your whole life. So even if you’re not like completely I don’t know, balanced or whatever, it doesn’t mean you can’t be in a relationship--I mean obviously it’s preferable to be balanced...but I think that the main important thing is to not expect that to heal anything...you know what I mean... by itself.

While not true of every single participant, what seemed to be common factors among participants who had a more balanced view of queer relationships was either age or experience with queer relationships; experiences could be either in their own relationships, or through experiences engaging with queer friends' relationships.

III. "THERE IS A LOT OF GROPING AROUND IN THE DARK TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WORKS": QUEER RELATIONSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

This section focuses on the social-psychological dynamics of queer dating and relationships as well as the developmental impact highlighted by a number of participants in the study. This section illustrates the combined impact of structural inequalities and minority stress as they relate to developmental issues central to adolescence, such as the significance of romantic relationships (and perceived effects of delayed dating and isolation) and connections between intimate relationships, identity development and self-esteem.
Dynamics of Queer Dating and Adolescent Development

Gabri is one of the few youth who does not feel that LGBTQ relationships always move faster; however, in her discussion of this dynamics she provides valuable insight into why "things might go really fast" for younger people in the early stages of figuring out their sexual identity. She offers this example:

Gabri: Like say you found out you’re a lesbian and you just get into a lesbian relationship things might go really fast because like, you’re just finding out who you are and you have all these emotions and everything.

Gabri illustrates how age, identity, (in)experience may play a role in an early relationships, suggesting all the emotions "and everything" that accompanies the process of "finding out who you are" are key factors. The stress and confusion associated with this lack of relationship scripts and relationship inexperience proves to be a consistent issue facing many LGBTQ youth.

The co-occurrence of themes relating to inexperience and the lack of social scripts for dating was common. Some participants directly related early dating experiences (or lack of early dating experiences) to feeling "developmentally stunted". Olivia alludes to a possible developmental effect of a lack of social scripts, inexperience, and isolation; explaining how it's really hard to talk about relationships. Similarly, Jayla reflects on a question about whether she'd be able to talk with her partner about her comfort levels with different kinds of intimacy, saying

Jayla: I don’t know. I don’t know if I would feel comfortable talking about that, just because I’m getting to know them, but also I’ve never really talked about it with anyone. I feel like at some point you can talk about that, but I don’t feel comfortable doing that. I don’t know how it would come up. I guess you’d have to be in the moment, and just realize: “oh, it worked out… so…”.
Sexual minority stress and the pressures social inequalities create for queer youth in regards to their relationships end up having a negative impact on how they relate to partners in romantic and intimate relationships. Another example of this is seen when Ursay voices the perception that the fear that a relationship might not work can spirals into a lot of issues, including jealousy and not trusting people.

Nate offers an insightful analysis of a possible cause/effect scenario where a confluence of factors relating to being young, gay, and experiencing problems (including violence) in relationships. He points to having a delayed start at dating, being isolated, shy and possibly bullied at school, and feeling as though you have been sexually repressed (or unable to express your sexuality through sexual behavior). These factors, combined with the sudden increase in "opportunities" resulting from leaving home to attend college, created a context where there is more "drama" in gay relationships than in straight relationships. He specifically voices the perception that this is because they (cisgender, straight couples) learned what it was like to date, and were able to begin to establish "who they are," earlier in high school.

*The significance of early dating relationships.* A lack of experience, desire to be in a relationship, and a lack of social scripts can have serious consequences, such as not recognizing the need for relationship boundaries, knowing how to communicate about relationship boundaries, or not knowing what limits are appropriate or healthy. Further, experiences in early dating relationships can impact youth's interpersonal and romantic relationships later in life. For example, Heyes, in reference to a friend's "older lover of like, 20 years", explains, that it "it was
essentially statutory rape...but my friend will reference it like a voluntary act, like he was not
forced into it" continuing,

Heyes: but at the same time he doesn't know what...what was not authentic to him
because... [clears throat] I mean, when you're in the thick of that, you don't know what's
sort of an infatuation and what the person in front of you is sort of doing to your
judgment. But he doesn't reference it as like a negative, um, a negative decision, I guess,
at the time, you know, with what he had in front of him, it was a positive thing to do. But
now he thinks that, looking back at it, it could easily have been a very negative
consequence, action or event.

Heyes mentions that his college-aged friend didn't know what was "not authentic" because he
was essentially wrapped up in the moment, but this scenario begs the question of whether or not
something like this, that "could easily have [had] a very negative consequence", would have
occurred if his friend had more relationship experience or a more developed sense of boundaries
around age differentials in relationships.

A particularly poignant example of this is from Nate, a participant who was in an abusive
relationship and discusses how the impact of that early relationship experience poised him to
look for "perfection" for awhile after it was over--before he realized that "perfection" is
impossible. He explains,

Heyes: The more I start dating and seeing other people -- I am seeing a really nice guy
now -- I realize that that is not how normal people are. I have people that ask me about
my feelings and don't look at me with disgust when I cry and just stare at me...people
that, you know, don't come on that strong and tell me that I am the best person in the
world...because that's...not how normal people bond with each other... but unfortunately...
for a while after the break-up that was all I would look for, was someone who thought I
was absolutely amazing and um, just everything would be perfect. That's what he would
always say, we are perfect, we are perfect... it turns out that that does not exist and it's not
supposed to be because everyone has feelings and thoughts and that those are okay, and
you are allowed to talk about those with the other person, so -- but the first relationship
thing, the problem with that is that when you have no prior experience, that is all you see.
He notes that inexperience plays a role, and highlights the impact of his abusive partner telling him they were "perfect", even though things were not perfect. It created (or perhaps supported) the notion that perfection was possible and something to strive for, an idea that he said stuck with him, despite recognizing that the other behaviors his abusive boyfriend engaged in were "not normal".

A key theme here seems to be that you learn from early relationship experiences. Likewise, if early relationship experiences occur when you are older--or occur in a social context where there are "no rules" or scripts to guide you, there are consequences. A gay male focus group participant highlights this connection, saying, "I had relationships in high school pretty young, [and] I'd still like, grow up because of them; but we didn't really have any like, role models to look at." Drew makes a larger claim about young people today, linking sexual promiscuity to maturity and a lack of self-respect. He explains, "a lot of the people don’t have that [self-]respect, and... they just give it out to whoever wants it, and, I just wish that they were able to be more mature and know how important it is to actually be safe." More examples of the role of early relationship experiences, and evidence of their significance for healthy relationship development are referenced in previous sections. Taken as a whole, evidence provides a strong case for the claim that queer adolescent development is impacted by the structural inequalities and social stress in relation to healthy relationship development. This seems to occur mainly due to delays in dating experience and the perceived link between maturation, the context in which relationships begin and the impact of stress on relationship quality, and negative experiences due to a lack of social scripts, inexperience, and isolation.
**Queer dating challenges and friendships in adolescence.** Another area of interest to adolescent development is the impact (or risk) of queer dating on relationships with close friends. Felicia, cited earlier, points to the fear of loss of friends due to relationship dissolution, because in her experience the friend/dating circle is so small. Other youth similarly point to the risk of having friends have to "take sides" in regard to relationships. In the specific context of queer adolescent romantic relationships, it is important to note the intersection of the centrality of peers during adolescence with queer youth reports of small communities and "communities that are not all around you". In this context, losing your "whole circle" as well as "the person you're closest to" may have an even larger effect; especially for youth who feel they may not have other social supports, such as close family ties or the ability to talk openly about their relationships. Friendships with other queer young people are valuable, and youth's worries about their friendships likely speak to issues such as losing their system of support and the validation and affirmation offered by queer friends.

**Relationships and Sexual Identity Development**

For queer youth in particular, the strong desire to engage in a dating or sexual relationship may be further complicated because of sexual-identity norms in the contemporary U.S., whereby identities “marked” by virtue of not being heterosexual are often defined or demonstrated through sexual behavior. This is illustrated in Britt's reflection in the previous chapter on what she believe to be a unique predicament facing bisexuals, saying "I think we like, define sexual orientation by...who you’re with." A focus group participant put it this way: "you're like, straight until proven gay." Alternately, another participant suggests that while they've
"never really seen someone...be like] just so that people know I’m gay, I’ve got to find a partner"
although, she notes, "I’m sure it probably exists." She goes on to say that they have heard of the
idea that someone is "only thought of as gay if they are with someone of the same-sex... also,
that people seem to think if you’re bi, [and] you’ve dated a woman you have to date a man next--
you have to balance things out". So the role of romantic and sexual relationships in sexual
identity formation is not fully clear--although it was not uncommon to hear young people talk
about the need to "assert" their identity in general, or "prove" their identity in certain situations,
like to their parents. The idea that someone might be interested in engaging in a relationship to
try and figure out their sexual identity was also an emergent theme, often cited as a source of
annoyance or stress. In addition to the possibility of feeling a sense of external pressure to
engage in or sustain a relationship so that your behavior matches your identity, it may also be
possible that some queer adolescents may question their own developing identity if they remain
uncoupled or sexually inactive. Although varied in form, the prevalence of these types of
discussions point to the significance and role of romantic or intimate relationships not only for
the psycho-social developmental milestones for adolescence, but for identity development in and
of itself.

*Family relationships and self-concept.* Britt, for example, is open about her (lesbian)
sexual identity to almost everyone; suggesting in fact, that she would not date someone who was
not "out". At the same time, Britt actively withholds certain information from her parents about
who she is dating, saying "I don’t think that I’d hesitate to tell them if I had a boyfriend, because
like, my dad’s... pushed boys on me.” As she explains in the previous chapter, as a teenager
living at home, her parents literally "control her life". Jayla expressed having a similar strategy of controlling information about her relationships at home certain through use of gender neutral language. Research has established that supportive family ties serve as a protective factor against suicide (Ryan et al. 2009). In light of this finding on the positive effect family as a source of support has on mental health, it is possible real (or perceived) lack of support (or outright rejection or violence) may conversely serve as an impediment to healthy psycho-social development. Specifically perhaps, in relation to identity development and the cultivation of a positive self-concept. Internalization of homo/bi/transphobia as well as issues such as low-self esteem that result from mistreatment due to one’s sexual or gender identity are also identified by youths as salient factors when looking at queer dating, dating conflicts and abuse.

IV. DISCUSSION

The characterization of [adolescent] relationships as short and superficial is incomplete. These relationships are central in adolescent's lives. (Furman and Shaffer 2003:3)

*Queer Adolescent Development and Romantic Relationships*

In the context of what is conceived as normative adolescent development, the process of forming intimate attachments in the context of romantic relationships is an important developmental task for the transition to adulthood (Collins et al. 2009). Diamond (2003) points to significant issues in psychological research on adolescent romantic relationships, suggesting that "romantic relationships provide youth the opportunity to master critical skills related to patience, mutuality, commitment, trust and emotion regulation," with the latter being especially
important (493). Thus, results indicating that queer youth may "rush" into relationships too fast, that relationships accelerate or move to quickly, and the suggestion that youth's motivation to be or stay in a relationship is based on fear (rooted in the perception that their options are more limited than their heterosexual peers), raise theoretically relevant concerns for research on adolescent development and violence in romantic relationships among queer youth. Further, the difference between youth's reported desire to be in a relationship, perception of their ability to achieve this desire, and the added pressure of feeling the need to have romantic or intimate relationships in order to legitimate their identity also point to possible issues relating to key developmental tasks during adolescence.

On a broader level, these findings are significant because they establish the need for an integrative theory of queer adolescent development and its relationship with LGBTQ romantic relationships and conflict. As adolescent-aged youth, developmental status and social experiences likely influence how conflict and violence are negotiated in dating relationships (Collins et al. 2009). Results indicate that queer youth feel much less experienced with romantic and intimate relationships compared to their cisgender, heterosexual peers. This mirrors findings in other research on the queer youth's perceptions and experiences in dating relationships (Diamond 2003; Gillum and DiFulvio 2012). Taken together, findings around delayed entry or experience with adolescent romantic relationships, and results that speak to observed differences in the functioning of queer adolescent relationships (accelerated speed, higher intensity, etc.) may in part be explained by less-developed skills around emotional regulation and attachment issues that are acquired through engaging in new and different types of relationships during
adolescence. A delay in achieving key developmental skills associated with romantic relationships in adolescence, due to systemic issues relating to LGBTQ-status (such as a lack of access to partners) likely has implications for the health and functioning of later relationships.

Friendships during adolescence are of central importance and exploring possible differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual adolescents’ friendships and interactions with peers may prove relevant to queer dating and violence research. Some research suggests patterns of support received from friends may vary among heterosexual and sexual-minority youth (Diamond and Lucas 2004). Further, research suggests sexual-minority friends offer more support around sexuality-related issues (Doty et al. 2010). Queer youth in this study reported the perception that friendships, relationships with non-queer adolescent-aged peers, and familial relationships were impacted in various ways by their LGBTQ-identities. While a more nuanced pattern of the nature and extent of the impact was not clear, the implications may prove relevant and signifies an area in need of future research.

Focusing primarily on scholarship centralizing heterosexual romantic relationships and development, Collins and Laursen (2004) point to the interrelationship of peer and romantic relationships, noting, for example, commonalities around patterns of support and control. Citing a new direction in adolescent research, they also suggest "signs of convergence [and transformations] across relationships" between families, friends and romantic partners make it "equally likely...that the parallels between early adults relationships... [also reflect commonalities with] prior relationships with parents" (Collins and Laursen 2004:60). Thus, contentious relationships with peers or parents may correlate with tenuous relationships with romantic
partners. Coupled with disproportionate rates of parental rejection, a lack of identity-affirmation, and the violence that sometimes occurs in parent-child relationships as a result of LGBTQ-identities raise concerning questions if this pattern holds true for queer adolescents. Findings that suggest friendship-relationships may also be places where abuse is possible point to another potential area of vulnerability in this sense. It is likely there is some connection between the quality and form of interpersonal relationships among queer youth, their families, and their friends—but what that connection looks like, and whether or not it differs or mirrors cisgender heterosexual adolescents cannot be determined based on the data collected in this study. This is an area in need of additional research.

In a broader context, issues relating to minority status and family present a unique context for many queer adolescents. In many minority communities, the family is a place where individual family members can come together and find strength and refuge from dominant society. Most queer adolescents’ immediate family members are not LGBTQ-identified, and levels of support around gender/sexual-minority status varies significantly. Additionally, most LGBTQ adolescents must rely on their families to meet their basic needs, so even a perceived threat of homo/bi/transphobia within the context of family of origin may limit youth’s willingness to communicate about problems in dating relationships, while also impacting identity development and queer youth's sense of self.

*Sexual and Gender Minority Stress and Queer Dating Culture*

Another important contribution these findings make can be found in the link between sexual minority stress and the pressures that social inequalities put on queer youth in regards to
their relationships. This took two main forms. First when participants made a connection between the perception/reality, motivation, or pressure to stay in unfulfilling, unhealthy, or even abusive relationships because they fear they will never have anyone else to date, and do not want to be alone. Second, the pressure and social stress endemic to many relationships was cited as having a direct link to negative behaviors in relationships, how they relate to their partners. This may be especially relevant when looking at theoretical perspectives on violence and abuse in relationships, as it points to a link between power (in this case, feelings of powerlessness) and the possibility of unhealthy reactions due to the jealousy and lack of trust they exacerbate. The added pressure resulting from chronic minority stress combined with possible developmental issues creates a high potential for negative outcomes ranging from unhealthy relationship dynamics to exploitation and abuse.

*Cultural Ideologies and the Romanticization of Relationships*

The lack of emphasis on gender in youth narratives does not mean that the youth in this sample were necessarily immune to gender socialization or the influences of gender-based patterns in their sense of themselves in relation to others or in their relationships—it is likely youth have internalized to varying degrees gendered patterns inherent in dominant relationship ideologies. For example, youth participants' application of heterosexual examples to explain queer relationships were not modified to either confirm or refute "traditional" or heteronormative gender-based relationship patterns. This finding is interesting, given the possibility of underlying or assumed (or sub-conscious) beliefs about gender embedded in these narratives. From a different angle, this can be viewed in a cautiously positive light as well: if youth participants
view their relationships as more similar to than different from heterosexual relationships, it may be the case that youth are more open to the idea that abuse is possible in queer relationships. Data presented in the next chapter will provide a stronger foundation for understanding the nature of youths conceptualization of queer versus non-queer relationships, and the implications for queer youths negotiations of dating conflicts and violence.

Emergent themes also indicate the internalization of romanticized, or idealized, notions of relationships. These findings mirror another recent study with male sexual minority youth, which suggested a tendency for young gay/bisexual men to overestimate idealized love (Bauermeister et al. 2011:110). This romanticized view of what queer relationships are or will be like appears to change over time and with experience. Yet, ideas about what an "ideal" relationship looks like are often derived from heteronormative relationship scripts. Coupled with relationship inexperience and a lack of role models, youth often do not know how to act or react in relationships that to not meet the ideal.

*Queer Adolescent Dating: A Culture (Not Protective) Against Violence?*

It is possible that some of the factors that make queer dating "unique" may also support an environment where intimate partner violence and abuse is not protected against. Queer youth dating culture is impacted by heteronormativity, heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia on multiple levels. Combined with a dominant culture that in many ways condones violence, these dynamics contribute to the potential for community culture to engender, conceal, and exacerbate dating abuse. The perception/reality that there are fewer options for dating partners, combined with what is often presented as an "increased desire" to be in a relationship, likely increases the
chance that queer youth may choose to stay in unfulfilling, unhealthy, or abusive relationships. This was a direct link made by a number of participants. Further, not knowing what a healthy queer relationship looks like, dating inexperience, or differential in levels of dating experience between partners, may increase vulnerability; opening the door for manipulation and abuse, and increasing the chance that abuse will go unrecognized. This may be compounded by factors such as disruptions in the achievement of normative adolescent development tasks (such as identity development) due to delayed engagement in romantic relationships and factors relating to sexual and gender minority stress (such as the internalization of a negative self-concept).

A lack of inclusive/culturally competent education about healthy relationships/sexuality limits access to crucial health information. It also alienates youth and supports a closed-door climate in schools and families. Fear or secrecy about being “out” about same-sex relationships may increase youth's reluctance to disclose abuse. As a result, it appears that frameworks and theories generated for LGBTQ adult populations, and cisgender heterosexual adolescent populations, most likely fail to account for important factors and dynamics unique to the experiences of queer adolescent victims of dating violence.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter identifies the social, community, and interpersonal factors and dynamics that emerge as themes pertinent to queer dating, romantic relationships, and dating culture. While the general sense that queer dating was both the same and different from straight or heterosexual
dating was often asserted by participants, it is clear the social conditions created by a heterosexist and homo-bi-transphobic culture provided the foundation for what made queer dating and relationships different. Specifically, sexual and gender minority stress proved to be a uniting dynamic across most of the things youth participants indicated made their experiences unique. Further, the effects of these conditions and resultant stress, appear to be of significance to individual and interpersonal development of queer adolescents. In light of the dynamics and factors highlighted in youth narratives around minority stress and queer adolescent development, the next chapter will present the final set of findings, discussing how queer youth conceptualize and negotiate dating conflicts and violence in their relationships.
The central research question grounding this study is addressed in this chapter: "How do queer adolescents conceptualize and negotiate violence and abuse in romantic relationships?". The intersection of institutionalized inequalities, sexual and gender minority stress, and age create a unique landscape for queer adolescent relationships as well as relationship violence and abuse. Key findings from this chapter indicate that queer youth feel relationship violence is a serious and prevalent issue in their communities. While convinced it occurs and recognizing it as a serious but under-acknowledged problem, many say they have no direct knowledge of its occurrence; they say they have never experienced it, nor have their friends. Yet, in the course of narratives and focus group discussions, many of the same youth describe real-life examples of "crazy", "socially manipulative", or "controlling" relationships; pointing to incidents of sexual "molestation", "pressure", and physical violence such as slapping and punching. This apparent contradiction reflects a clear disconnect in the ways queer adolescents think and talk about relationship violence.

Engaging with larger discourses of conflict and violence in intimate relationships, social-psychological perspectives on adolescent relationships, and intersectional approaches to inequality, this chapter uses an integrative theoretical approach. The seemingly contradictory way queer youth talk about relationship violence is a result of structural inequalities, cultural
discourses, and community norms that make sexual and gender minority stress a central issue in youth's lives. Further, SGMS intersects with developmental issues unique to adolescence, with implications for queer youth relationships.

This chapter builds on findings presented in previous chapters, presenting an analysis of queer adolescent perceptions and negotiations of dating violence, and identifying key issues and dynamics relating to LGBTQ adolescent experiences. Results offer valuable insight into the way queer adolescents conceptualize and negotiate dating violence. However, it would be remiss to assume the patterns, dynamics, and features of their narratives are solely attributable to LGBTQ/youth-status. It is very likely that universal elements of IPV are present in youth narratives, while at the same time, it is very likely that there are specific elements, dynamics, or features that are especially salient to LGBTQ adolescent experiences with IPV. Thus, while results are intended to be read in light of broader discourses of IPV, the findings presented here centralize the experiences and views of LGBTQ adolescent populations. This means their perceptions and negotiations of violence are not explained or interpreted in response to dominant reference groups. The full breadth and depth of emergent themes from qualitative data collected from queer youth remain the central focus of this chapter, intended to address the significant lack of qualitative data available on queer adolescent relationship violence.

The chapter begins with a review of empirical findings on queer and adolescent relationship violence; identifying themes and dynamics that inform the analysis of results specific to LGBTQ relationship violence and abuse among adolescents. The three sections that follow present results from the study. Findings address gaps in sociological, feminist and health
IPV scholarship, and point to pertinent issues in the emerging literature on queer adolescent development and romantic relationships. Part II will focus on findings related to language, perceptions and power. It will provide insight into youth's perceptions of how prevalent relationship violence is in queer adolescent communities, and discuss the language used to define and explain relationship violence. Part III will examine the relationship between youth's individual experiences with relationship violence, community norms, cultural ideologues and structural inequalities. Part IV highlights how sexual and gender minority stress relate to developmental issues during adolescence, and influence participants' views of and experiences with relationship violence. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Queer adolescent dating violence\textsuperscript{15} is an under examined topic and the literature is extremely limited in scope. The near omission of this population from sociological and feminist scholarship on intimate partner violence (IPV) likely results from a combination of factors. There are many aspects of IPV that remain un- or under-examined due to systemic inequalities and the resulting marginalization of survivors who do not fit the socially constructed "ideal victim": a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman (Meloy and Miller 2011). While it seems that much of what we know about intimate partner violence among heterosexual couples can be

\textsuperscript{15} The phrases "dating violence" and “relationship violence” will be used to reference IPV among adolescents. The CDC defines teen dating violence as “a type of intimate partner violence... occur[ing] between two people in a close relationship. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual” (2011b).
applied to same-sex relationship violence, it is clear that LGBTQ experiences with interpersonal violence are heavily influenced by the heterosexist and homo/bi/trans-phobic context of our society (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002). Further, scholarship on heterosexual teen dating violence points to qualitative differences that challenge the applicability of adult frameworks of intimate partner violence for use in adolescent populations (Mulford and Giordano 2008). Specifically, the developmental status and social experiences of adolescent-aged youth significantly influence how they negotiate conflict and violence in dating and romantic relationships (Collins et al. 2009). This section will review the small but emerging body of literature on same-sex and queer adolescent relationship violence, as well as highlight issues and dynamics relevant to LGBTQ youth, who exist at the intersections of queer gender and/or sexuality, and adolescence.

*Contextualizing Queer Adolescent Dating Violence Research*

It has only been in the past several decades that the influence of social context on the experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among minority groups, including racial and ethnic minorities (Crenshaw 2010; Hamby 2005; West 2004), immigrants (Klevens 2007; Narayan 1995), heterosexual adolescents (Lloyd and Emery 1999), and adult same-sex couples (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Cruz 2003; Hassouneh and Glass 2008) have been examined. The marginalization and delegitimation of same-sex relationships and near erasure of transgender populations in larger society is mirrored in social scientific research, and it has been suggested that queer communities may be reluctant to acknowledge IPV due to fears of added stigmatization (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Donovan and Hester 2010). In addition to community
norms and the paucity of social scientific and health research, absence from mainstream discourses cause dating violence and abuse in LGBTQ adolescent relationships (and sometimes the relationships themselves) to appear non-existent. This invisibility contrasts starkly with the physical, emotional and spiritual impact of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, which is not only devastating to individuals, but detrimental to communities and society at large.

The available research on adolescent dating violence in queer populations almost exclusively focuses on lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified youth, (Freedner et al. 2002), youth reporting same-sex romantic or sexual partners (Halpern et al. 2004), or youth reporting different and/or same-sex sexual partners (Pathela and Schillinger 2010). It appears transgender or otherwise gender non-conforming youth are largely excluded from the limited amount of teen dating violence literature. This invisibility feeds into the isolation that accompanies victimization by an intimate partner, and poses a serious threat to a population already evidenced to be at disproportionate risk of adverse mental and physical health outcomes, and violent victimization (Coker et al. 2010; Saewyc 2011).

A growing body of population-based research on LGB or same-sex adolescent dating violence yields prevalence rates approximating those in heterosexual adolescent populations (Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004; Pathela and Schillinger 2010). Drawing on both community-based samples and nationally representative data, studies like these have identified that LGB or same-sex teen dating violence is, in fact, a social problem and public health concern. Qualitative research on this topic is especially scant, and this chapter goes beyond attempts to document the problem of LGBTQ adolescent dating violence; instead seeking to examine the
ways LGBTQ adolescents conceptualize and negotiate dating conflict and violence in their communities; specifically in a cultural context where heterosexuality is the norm and structural factors limit youths' access to complex examples of same-sex intimate relationships.

*Queer Adolescent Intimate Partner Violence: Substantive Findings*

The existing literature on the topic of intimate partner violence among queer adolescents is extremely sparse. While there is little data establishing how dating violence may vary between heterosexual and queer youth, recent research using a nationally representative sample of adolescents indicates that almost 25 percent of youth with same-sex dating or sexual partners have experienced some form of physical or psychological victimization within the past 18 months, with 11 percent reporting physical violence, and 13 percent reporting psychological violence alone (Halpern et al. 2004). Other quantitative studies suggest that rates of IPV among this population are either equivalent to (Freedner et al. 2002) or greater than (Pathela and Schillinger 2010) those reported in heterosexual adolescent relationships.

There is some evidence that the prevalence of certain types of intimate partner violence vary among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. In a nationally representative study of adolescents aged 12–21, females with same-sex romantic or sexual partners reported higher rates of victimization than males with same-sex romantic or sexual partners (Halpern et al. 2004:128). In a community-based sample of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual youth, bisexual males reported higher odds of experiencing any abuse (identified in this study as control, emotional, scared for safety, physical, and sexual) than heterosexual males, and bisexual females reported greater odds of experiencing sexual abuse (Freedner et al. 2002:471). Data from a regionally
representative sample suggest that males with sexual partners of both sexes report significantly higher rates of intimate partner violence than other male subgroups, and both male and female respondents with partners of both sexes reported experiences with partner violence and with forced sex; and at rate the authors note is three times the national estimates for these measures (Pathela and Schillinger 2010:883). For this review, I was unable to find any research reporting on dating violence among transgender youth populations, but based on findings suggesting even more pronounced disparities for transgender populations detailed in previous chapters, it can reasonably be assumed that transgender/gender-queer youth are similarly if not more likely to be victims or perpetrators of adolescent dating violence.

A rare qualitative research study of queer adolescent relationships violence was conducted with a college-student sample of 18 sexual minority youth\(^\text{16}\) (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012). Focus group data highlights four main themes participants felt contributed to dating violence among same-sex couples; including (1) homophobia (internalized and institutionalized), (2) negotiating socially prescribed gender roles; (3) assumed female connections; and (4) other relationship issues (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012). "Other relationship issues" include those similar to heterosexual couples, such as “incompatibility, one person not being ready for a relationship, stress, class differences, lack of clarity regarding relationships status, and jealousy” but some were reported to manifest more intensely or differently in LGBTQ relationships; for example, jealousy was identified as doubled for when you’re dating a bi-girl as a woman (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012:738). Further, the “‘intense stigma’ of ‘being other’ than heterosexual’ was

\(^{16}\)"Sexual minority youth" in this study are defined as 18-24 year olds who are LGBTQ and who report dating or being sexually intimate with a member of the same sex.
identified as one of the most important dynamics for understanding the presence of intimate partner violence in LGBTQ relationships (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012:731). The culture of homo[bi-trans-phobia] seems to be structural and individual/relational-level issues, resulting in youth keeping their relationships a secret, feeling isolated and/or ashamed of their identity (Gillum and DiFulvio 2012). Gillum and DiFulvio (2012) conclude that “the dynamics of homophobia and heterosexuality as the privileged orientation may provide permission or tacit support for victimization in dating situations” (733).

On the topic of disclosure, Freeder et al.’s (2002) data from a community-based sample indicates that of the young men who experienced some form of abuse, more than one quarter did not tell anyone; similarly, about 31 percent of females who had experienced abuse did not report it (472). There were no statistical differences across sexual orientation groups; however, among both males and females who disclosed abuse, almost everyone disclosed to a friend, and less than one-sixth reported their abuse to an adult (Freedner et al. 2002:473). Freedner et al. (2002) also found that nearly half of the lesbians reporting abuse had been abused by a male partner, prompting the authors to highlight the importance of distinguishing between behavior and identity (473).

Key Factors and Dynamics in Same-Sex Adult Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence between same-sex\textsuperscript{17} couples cannot be understood outside of the specific social, historical, and political context in which it occurs. While the consensus seems

\textsuperscript{17} The use of "same-sex" as opposed to "LGBTQ" or "queer" reflects scholarship that has primarily focused on same-sex relationships and lesbian and gay populations; research on transgender populations and intimate partner violence is virtually non-existent, although it is likely that many dynamics and issues identified in research on "same-sex" couples may be applicable to the broader queer community.
to be that “the dynamics surrounding same-gender abuse mimic heterosexual domestic violence” in terms of the cyclical nature of abuse patterns (Kulkkin et al. 2007), the psychological effects of abusive control and manipulation (Kuehnle and Sullivan 2003), and the use of certain battering tactics (Allen and Leventhal 1999), the interrelationship between inequalities present on the individual, interpersonal, and structural levels of society cause intimate partner violence to differ in significant ways among queer individuals and communities

*Heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia.* Oppression and inequality are perpetuated by heterosexist and homo/bi/transphobic social institutions, the effects of which are experienced on every level of society. The complex relationship between (1) violence within LGBTQ communities in the form of intimate partner violence and (2) violence enacted at institutional levels is explained in the following way by Allen and Leventhal (1999),

The domestic violence within our communities has everything to do with the hostility and condemnation directed against them. Such a climate encourages self-loathing, separates us from one another and from the straight world, creates a false sense of safety and security within the confines of our communities, and leaves us in fear of the consequences of “airing our dirty laundry” in public. GLBT batterers can use the conditions created by homo/bi/transphobia and heterosexism to wield highly effective weapons against their partners. (P. 76)

Social institutions that are antagonistic to or silent about LGBTQ issues create an environment hospitable to violence. Such a climate is conducive to the internalization of homo/bi/transphobia, isolation, and perpetuation of myths that obscure the presence of interpersonal violence. Other forms of structurally based oppression, such as inequalities upheld by the legal system through discriminatory domestic violence laws and homophobia in the courts and legal profession (Fray-Witzer 1999), fear of revictimization by law enforcement (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Kuehnle
and Sullivan 2003), and the lack of widespread and comprehensive protection against discrimination (Girshick 2002), can easily be manipulated by individual perpetrators to further victimize and silence their partners.

**Community and cultural norms.** Community and cultural norms specific to queer communities also support LGBTQ battering in a variety of ways. The most common manifestations of this are informal and covert, and may include a hesitancy or refusal to acknowledge and address intimate partner violence (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002). The ubiquity of stereotypes and cultural narratives that overwhelmingly portray victims of intimate partner violence as white, female-bodied, heterosexual women, may in part explain why many queer survivors fail to conceptualize or label their experiences of intimate partner violence as intimate partner violence or abuse (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002).

In addition, silence in many queer communities around intimate partner violence has resulted in a lack of clear definitional dialogues for LGBTQ victims of violence (Giorgio 2002). The result: not only are survivors unable to fully express their experiences of pain, but the person who inflicts pain can deny it exists, causing the survivor to question whether their experiences really count as abuse (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002). For some queer folks, the inability of language to even adequately capture the basic elements of their relationship (e.g. "spouse" or "married") has consequences. On a broader level, the lack of a shared language to discuss issues of sexual violence may undermine attempts to gain political representation (Girshick 2002).

Another result of heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia is the absence of complex
representations of queer individuals and relationships (Cruz 2003). The effect of this is a lack of relationship, or social scripts for LGBTQ relationships (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Cruz 2003). This has implications for intimate partner violence, as Cruz (2003) suggests,

> the issues of naiveté or inexperience with same-sex relationships are interesting to explore, as the gay community seemingly does not have comparable relationships to emulate. Without public or widespread social support, gays and lesbians who are successfully coupled are not necessarily as visible as they can be so that positive relationship styles and modes for coping in a same-sex relationship are generally hidden from view. This is unique to same-sex relationships, as examples of "positive" heterosexual relationship models are replete, within our culture. (P. 6)

The absence of clear definitional dialogues around intimate partner violence, and the lack of complex representations of queer relationships and relationship scripts may be of particular importance in regard to the issue of queer adolescent dating violence.

*Dominant cultural ideologies.* Same-sex or otherwise-queer intimate partner violence is not only overlooked within queer communities; it is also goes unrecognized in dominant society. It is likely that a contributing factor is the continued stigmatization of same-sex relationships and relative invisibility of transgender populations in mainstream society. Another contributing factor may be the fact that normative, gender-based relationship scripts do not easily match up with the participants and patterns of queer relationships (Allen and Leventhal 1999). The rootedness of gender ideologies and the institutionalization of heterosexuality provide the basis for claims that society does not know how to deal with aggression occurring in queer relationships (Girshick 2002; Hassouneh and Glass 2008). Focusing on the specific issue of female-on-female sexual assault, Girshick (2002) points out that woman-on-woman rape is oftentimes taken less seriously because of culturally-based notions that a woman cannot sexually
assault another woman (or man, for that matter). Women who are sexually assaulted by another woman, then, often have trouble conceptualizing their assault as a legitimate sexual assault, and may harbor legitimate fears that they will not be taken seriously or that services will be inadequate or denied (Girshick 2002).

*Discourses of gender and power.* A social context where dominant understandings of intimate partner violence are inextricably linked with gender inequality and institutionalized through ideologies about gender norms, expectations, and behaviors has the effect of silencing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). The combined effects of dominant ideologies and power structures that are heterosexist and patriarchal are reflected in Giorgio's (2002) research on abused lesbians' negotiations of intimate partner violence, where she explains,

Lesbians negotiate a shared and concrete dissonance between their lived experience and dominant domestic violence discourse. Because our models of relationship violence are drawn from heterosexual women’s experiences, they do not capture nor reflect the specific needs of lesbian victims. Although lesbian abusers deploy similar tactics as their male counterparts—such as hitting, beating, verbally assaulting, and monitoring their victims—battered lesbians’ responses to and subjective negotiations of the abuse markedly contrast from those of their heterosexual counterparts. We witness this in how abused lesbians mediate a complicated nexus of power relations—protective services, the legal system, and their own loyalty to the relationship as well as their lesbian communities. (P. 1235)

This suggests gender is a pervasive feature of intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships-- as is an implicit heteronormativity, and more explicit homo/bi/transphobia. The result is a complex array of interpersonal, community, and structural factors that keep lesbian (and other GBTQ populations) silent, reluctant to seek legal services or access culturally-
competent care, and ultimately perpetuate a culture of silence in queer communities (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Cruz 2003; Giorgio 2002).

**Public perceptions.** Stereotypes rooted in ideas about what is natural or normal for women and men shape public perceptions about IPV. Dominant discourses construct an image of an "ideal victim" of intimate partner violence; a woman is blameless, white, middle-class, heterosexual, and cisgender. This has led many queer survivors to question, or fail to recognize, experiences of abuse as abuse (Giorgio 2002; Girshick 2002). The salience of gender stereotypes relating to intimate partner violence influence public perceptions of same-sex and queer IPV as well (Cruz 2003). Research has well-documented the effect misperceptions and stereotypes have on first-responders, police, domestic violence advocates, and in the courts. The real possibility of revictimization in the course of seeking help has been identified as an issue impacting help seeking relating to IPV.

**Patterns of power and control.** Allen and Leventhal (1999) point to the rootedness of power inequality in the institutions of gender and heterosexuality, not the qualitative differences in gender role scripts, in their assessment of how differential amounts of power are patterned into same-sex relationships. The authors begin by noting that heterosexual battering often occurs in a gendered context in which men and women have unequal amount of power, and while gendered power disparities do not manifest in same-sex relationships in the same way, queer individuals are socialized into a culture where normative relationship patterns are hierarchical. Miller (2005), who also identifies power as an important factor in same-gender relationships, suggests that power differences in queer relationships can result from unequal status due to differences in
education, social class, employment, ethnicity, earning potential, immigration status, and age, instead of gender (26). The general patterns of abusive use of power and control that characterize intimate partner violence seem to be consistent across diverse populations, suggesting that some elements of IPV may be universal (Cruz 2003; Giorgio 2002; Girshick 2002; Kulkin et al. 2007).

At the same time, status as a heavily stigmatized minority group changes the dynamic of the relationship between the batterer, the survivor, and socially instituted forms of oppression. Utilizing heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia to their advantage, batterers may also attempt to manipulate the system by misleading emergency responders, misusing and invading domestic violence shelters or agencies, and relying on stereotypes to transfer blame to the non-offending partner (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Giorgio 2002). This section reviewed empirical research on adult same-sex IPV with attention to possible dynamics that may impact LGBTQ adolescent perceptions and negotiations of relationship violence. The next section identifies key issues unique to heterosexual adolescent dating violence in order to lay the groundwork for an integrative discussion of relationship violence among LGBTQ youth.

*Relationship Violence among Cisgender, Heterosexual Adolescents*

While reported rates of heterosexual dating violence differ due to variations in the conceptualization and measurement of dating violence, a broadly accepted statistic for teen dating violence indicates approximately one in three high-school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship (Levy 2006). Despite such high reports of victimization, teen dating violence among different-sex partners has only recently begun to receive attention as a social and public health problem. As a result, researchers and practitioners have relied heavily on
frameworks developed for adults to conduct and analyze research on teens (Mulford and Giordano 2008). Utilizing adult frameworks to research and conceptualize adolescent IPV is less than ideal, as such frameworks may not prioritize or measure the different factors, dynamics, and conditions that make adolescent experiences with dating violence unique. Mulford and Giordano (2008) argue for the use of a gender-based developmental perspective that considers differences in the social context of adolescent relationships and developmental factors pertinent to adolescence.

*Key factors relating to relationship conflicts and violence.* Three key differences between intimate partner violence among heterosexual adults versus that in adolescent relationships are perceptions about gender equality, dating (in)experience, and the central role of peers (Mulford and Giordano 2008). Other issues include developmental factors and adolescent perceptions of what relationship violence and abuse looks like.

Gender (in)equality and socialization are often positioned as central dynamics in theories of intimate partner violence. While it seems unclear how heterosexual adolescent perceptions of power in relationships relate to actual power inequalities, the assertion of power and enactment of dating violence likely manifest in different ways for heterosexual adolescents than for heterosexual adults and queer adolescents. Prioritizing the role of socialization while taking a broader look at the way gender and power shape intimate relationships may be a useful strategy for exploring the way gender manifests in queer adolescent relationships, as the negotiation of gender-specific and gender non-conforming behavior is a key element of individual and social development for teens. Based on the varied ways that dominant gender ideologies manifest in
queer adult IPV, it is likely that gender will factor in LGBTQ adolescent dating violence narratives, although how it manifests and relates to power are unknown. There is a demonstrated need for empirical research on issues surrounding power dynamics in queer adolescent relationships, including perceptions of relationship equality and the role of gender as related to relationship conflicts and violence.

Psycho-social development, dating inexperience, and the centrality of peers are important elements for understanding adolescent dating relationships. Adelman and Hea Kil’s (2007) research on heterosexual youth conflict exemplifies how peer-centrality differentiates conflicts and abuse in adolescent relationships from adult IPV. Peer-centeredness is most central to the issue of help-seeking. Heterosexual and queer adolescents alike are less likely to seek support from formal organizations than from friends (Adelman and Hea Kil 2007; Freedner et al. 2002; Ocampo et al. 2007). Yet the quality of support offered by peers is a topic of debate (Adelman and Hea Kil 2007; Ocampo et al. 2007).

The function and significance of peer groups during adolescence is significant, and likely have multi-faceted effects on identity development and negotiations of relationship conflicts and violence. Yet, the social location of queer youth may impact the trajectory of their development. For example, queer youth are at increased risk of marginalization and isolation (Kosciw et al. 2008). Minority stress may impact the role friends and family play in romantic relationships. Findings from the previous chapter point to some possible differences between LGBTQ and cisgender, heterosexual youth relating to romantic relationships during adolescence. Thus, examining the relationship between friends and perceptions of social support is significant to
research on queer adolescent dating violence. Research with heterosexual adolescents also indicates that teenagers define dating violence differently from their adult counterparts, oftentimes including acts such as avoidance or being ignored; threats to one’s reputation or the disclosure of information to other peers/friends; and turning friends against a former dating partner (Adelman and Hea Kil 2007:1298).

Like heterosexual adolescent relationship violence, abuse in intimate relationships is a pervasive issue in same-sex relationships; yet, existent scholarship is mostly quantitative and provides only a limited picture of the issues and dynamics that contextualize queer adolescent dating violence. While it is likely that there are some universals in terms of the dynamics of adolescent relationship violence and conditions that may engender abuse, it is also likely that LGBTQ adolescents face unique challenges due to their social location in larger systems of oppression, as well as factors relating to adolescent development. The next section presents results focusing on the ways dating conflicts and violence are presented in youth narratives, emphasizing perceptions of abuse and the language used to talk about it.

II. "IT WASN'T VIOLENT OR ANYTHING, BUT...": LANGUAGE, PERCEPTIONS, AND POWER

This section describes participants' perceptions of violence in queer relationships. It will examine how youth define and explain relationship violence and abuse, with a particular focus on the language and particular words used when describing situations or incidents of serious relationship conflicts, violence or abuse. Emphasis on language and perceptions is crucial to understanding what queer youth think about abuse. It speaks to what extent they recognize abuse
as abusive, and speaks to the power of dominant discourses and the influence of culture on how minority communities conceptualize and address violence and abuse. In light of observations about the lack of social scripts for queer youth relationships, patterns of youths' perceptions, beliefs, disclosures and explanations of violence and abuse are necessary for understanding how youth conceptualize violence in their relationships and communities, and stands to make a strong contribution to scholarship on queer adolescent IPV.

General Perceptions about Violence in Queer Adolescent Relationships

Queer adolescents in this study voiced the belief that relationship violence definitely happens in their communities, with many suggesting that it occurs the same, if not more, than in the relationships of their cisgender, heterosexual peers. Often, youth supported this assertion by simply saying something to the effect of, "it makes sense". As Zane explains, "I haven’t seen much of it, but I’m sure a lot of it exists... I mean, you’re going to have abuse in any community". Also similar to Zane, most participants say they haven't actually seen or heard about it. However, the content of many of the same participant narratives tells a different story, containing renderings of direct or indirect experience with relationship violence. This provides support and may help to explain the strongly voiced belief that violence occurs "equally if not more" in queer relationships. Yet, it directly opposes their claim never to have seen it. This common pattern indicates a clear disconnect between the idea of queer relationship violence and the way youth actually perceive, categorize, or label real-life instances of violence in their own relationships or those of friends. In accordance, words like "relationship abuse," "intimate partner violence," and "rape," were often used inconsistently, typically employed when
discussing the topic in general or hypothetically, but much less often when detailing real-life examples.

A particularly illustrative example of this emerges during Kevin's interview, where he notes that while he hasn't thought too much about it, it makes sense that there would be violence in queer relationships because (like heterosexual relationships) there are often power differences. Yet, the passage below evidences the disjuncture between his beliefs about violence and the way he conceptualized actual situations involving violence. Kevin describes the relationship of one of his lesbian friends, saying,

Kevin: ...when Kate called [her partner], [she] would go running. There was a lot of power in Kate’s hands over [her]...which if it were in a heterosexual couple, if Kate were a man, it would be very much, you know, emotionally abusive or it could be emotional abuse, depending on how it’s done. There was maybe some very mild violence at one point, when someone slapped someone, but I don’t recall the details. I don’t think I have heard anyone, any couple that has had any violence.

Here, Kevin explicitly states that he doesn't think he's heard of any "couple that has had any violence." Yet, in the same passage, he offers an interpretation of a lesbian friend's relationship that would be "emotionally abusive" if a man were involved; further, there was what he terms "mild violence," defined as "slapp[ing]." Among other things, this example illustrates the disconnect and uncertainty many queer youth exhibit when talking about violence and abuse in queer relationships. Uncertainty is evident in the use of qualifying language, like "mild" in this case, to describe the physical violence. Further, he is hesitant to characterize the manipulation as emotionally abusive in the context of a lesbian relationship. The uncertainty, lack of internal coherence, and contradictions are highlighted by Kevin's ultimate conclusion that he doesn't believe he has heard of any couple whose relationship involved violence.
These inconsistencies do not suggest the youth participants and data collected for this study are unreliable, instead, within the context of the narrative as a whole, these characteristics are clear evidence of a lack of clear definitional dialogues to draw on when discussing queer relationship violence (Giorgio 2002). A lack of definitional dialogues and language that seems to "fit" make it difficult for LGBTQ individuals (even victims of violence themselves) to understand and label their abuse as abusive (Allen and Leventhal 1999; Girshick 2002). While the implication that what "counts" as abuse differs between queer and straight communities was a less prevalent viewpoint, it was mentioned by a few other participants, indicating an area in need of future research. More common was the type of qualifying language employed when words like "abuse" or "violence" were used. Equally common was the absence of words like "abuse" and "intimate partner violence" altogether in descriptions of encounters with conflicts or violence. These and other themes pertaining to the relationship between cultural ideologies, the power dynamics intrinsic to language, and the effect on youth's abilities to conceptualize, communicate about, and address violence will be examined more closely in the next section.

*The Power of Language: Describing Abuse and Sexual Violence*

Ursay is one of many participants who assert that abuse in LGBTQ relationships is a definite reality. Focusing on the distinction between abuse and violence, she explains,

> Ursay: There’s definitely abuse. I mean, if you’re being... I mean, if you’re being harassed; physically, emotionally, anything; someone is abusing you. So, I would probably use the word “abuse”, and not "violence"...if I were talking to someone about it, so they know the severity of the situation.

Signifying that "abuse" would convey a more serious situation than the use of the word "violence", Ursay's statement reflects that words have power, and access to language to talk
about relationship violence or abuse is important on both individual and community levels. For many queer youth in this study, including Ursay herself, a serious issue arises when youth fail to appropriately and/or confidently apply words and labels such as "abuse", "dating violence", "domestic violence" or "rape" to actual situations that either clearly, or most likely, qualify as being evidence of relationship abuse or other forms of intimate violence. The consistency of this finding points to a structurally rooted cause, and has serious implications for both friends of and survivors of queer adolescent relationship.

*Deconstructing examples of relationship violence.* Some of the main analytic themes that emerged from the data pertain to language use, a lack of social scripts, and the various factors that perpetuate a culture of silence and secrecy around abuse. A language-related theme that points to a lack of clear social scripts is evident in Seth's narrative, which demonstrates the uncertainty and avoidance of specific words (as discussed in relation to Kevin) as well as the pointing to some of the effects a lack of language has for queer youth who are victims of violence. In response to a prompt intended to elicit thoughts about relationship conflicts in queer communities, Seth asked whether I wanted to discuss the "heavy stuff" or the "light stuff."

Clarifying that the "light stuff" consists of things like breaking up, Seth offers an initial description of the "heavy stuff," which was presented as "the one night you didn't want to happen, and things happen, and you feel shitty after." He asked again which I wanted to hear about, and I replied that he could talk about whatever he felt comfortable with, and he went on to make a joke asking if it was "bad" he thinks the "light stuff" is "breaking up." He then goes on to explain,
Seth: Freshman year I met someone, and I invited them over and I really didn’t know them that well. And he really wanted sex, and I was like, “No, I don’t know you” and he pushed for it and some stuff happened and I wasn’t for that.

Interviewer: Wow... I’m sorry. That sucks. Did you feel like you could talk to somebody about that?

Seth: Not really. I didn’t talk to a lot of my friends just because... uh, you kind of get what you ask for, maybe?... You invite people over, you take that risk. You meet new people and it’s a dating thing, and they are not going to want to talk.

In this passage, Seth clearly indicates feeling both "shitty" and responsible for what happened, which seems embedded in the lack of social scripts for queer adolescent dating and intimate relationships as he then offers the perspective that "you take that risk" to "meet new people...it's a dating thing". The fact this situation occurred at the start of his first year of college seems important, as this experience seems to shape his views of what dating is. His decision not to talk to his friends for fear of being blamed is not uncommon for survivors of sexual assault or rape.

He doesn't use those works, but clearly indicates he said "no" to sex, but regardless, explains that "some stuff happened" that he "wasn't for". His narrative demonstrates feelings of shame and self-blame, both explicitly, and implicitly through his reluctance to talk to his friends and later, his stated desire "to just drop it" and to "get away from it". Downplaying the effect of the incident with his words contradicted the seriousness of the situation, and his tone of voice during this part of the interview reflected this. He was short, seemed angry, and avoided eye contact.

When I attempted to recognize what happened as serious by saying I was very sorry that happened, he replies "it was awhile ago" and shortly after it was clear that part of the discussion was over. This is unsurprising given the shame and stigma associated with experiences of sexual assault, especially for survivors who are men. The nature of his rationale for why it was his fault;
however, is significant. He notes that if you set up a date with someone, and invite them back to your room, they "are not going to want to talk," and thus you should expect to have sex if you make the choice to date. This is troubling, as he directly connects an unlabeled experience of sexual assault with what are presented as common dating norms.

The language use itself also reflects the pattern illustrated in Kevin's description, which he followed with the statement, "I can see that if it had gone down the violence path, it could have ended up in violence. There was no hardcore violence, where someone’s going to the hospital, but just, you know, struggles or whatever." Both Kevin and Seth use words like "mild" and "light" versus "heavy" and "hardcore" to describe their perceptions of the different types of relationship conflicts. Yet there is not a consistent way to interpret their use of language; "heavy" violence for Seth is date rape, which is certainly not described using those words. For Kevin, slapping and "just [some] struggles" in a situation where one person is very controlling of the other, is described as "mildly violent" and not abusive (while it would have been if it had been a man). These descriptions are not only unclear, but serve to minimize serious or potentially serious incidents of violence between intimate partners.

These themes are embodied in Yara's narrative, where the true nature of her relationship (the abusive dynamic, specifically) was never directly stated. It was only when Yara began to describe how her ex-girlfriend told her how to dress and monitored the websites she visited, in the context of other like comments, that it became clear there were elements of manipulation and control. Like Seth, she alludes to a lack of dating experience as a mitigating factor, and voiced similar concerns about talking to anyone about what happened. As she talks more about this
particular relationship, the negative impact becomes increasingly evident. Yara explains that although she had "no one to talk to" she ultimately wishes she had tried. She was fearful because she wasn't out to her family as they are "really religious" and the one option that may have been possible was her gay cousin. Yara explains why she was reluctant to talk with her in the following excerpt,

Yara: She's a really strongly opinionated person, so it would be like...which one of you [possibly unaccepting family or strongly opinionated cousin] is worse? I was just like, okay, I am just going to ride this out and see what happens.

Interviewer: [So you didn't talk with anyone?]

Yara: I don't know if I talked to her about this. I think this -- that might have been one of the things I like, regretted [didn't want] to tell her because I knew she would probably have been like, “You shouldn't be with her.”

Interviewer: Yeah.

Yara: And at the time I was like, “My first girlfriend! Oh my God! We are going to be together forever!” But... I kind of wish I would have like, talked to her about this.

Later in the focus group it became clear that upon hearing about her sexuality, her family was very unsupportive, indicating that talking to her family about her controlling girlfriend was in actuality, not a real possibility. In Yara's retrospective assessment, she wishes she had talked to her cousin about the situation; which suggests that doing so may have lessened the impact or somehow made the experience of the relationship better. At the time, her hope and belief that she and her first girlfriend would be together forever motivated her decision to overlook those behaviors, at least for awhile, and was stronger than her desire to talk about what was going on. Talking with her cousin may have resulted in helping her see how she had romanticized the relationship, but also may have taken away one of her only sources of sexuality-related support.
It is important to note that it was a combination of romanticism and relationship inexperience, as well as secrecy and isolation that resulted in a constrained choice to "ride out" her partner's unacceptably controlling (likely abusive) behavior.

Seth and Yara's discussions reflect a pattern imbued with power, whereby youth's use of language reflects and sustain a distance between "dating abuse", "dating violence", "intimate partner violence" and queer communities or relationships. Their narrative reflect the pattern discussed previously, where those phrases and words were often used to establish its presence and assert that it is a significant problem, but uncommonly used to describe actual situations or experiences. While Seth and Yara were youth who had direct experience with violence or control in an intimate dating situation or relationship, the same pattern was common among youth who provided examples of situations or dynamics in the relationships of queer friends or acquaintances. The general pattern is not unsurprising, as it mirrors a historically rooted trajectory similar to other minority groups language and discourse around IPV, and is reflective of the internalization of dominant cultural ideologies that preclude certain people or relationships from seeming to "fit" the definition intimate violence or rape.

_Conceptualizing sexual abuse and rape._ Uncertainty and reluctance to use the word "rape" was especially pronounced in youth narratives. Although occurring in a pattern similar to relationship violence in general, a number of youth provided examples that with little doubt could be classified as date rape or sexual abuse within relationship or dating contexts. Ursay made a very clear statement about the presence of abuse in queer relationship and stated the belief that it is necessary to use the word "abuse" as opposed to "violence" to convey its
magnitude. Yet, the common pattern of disconnect between hypothetical discussions of queer relationship abuse and violence and the use of words such as "abuse", "violence", and "rape" is exemplified later in her interview. This shift occurs when her discussion turns from talking about violence and abuse in a general sense, to recounting a situation involving a friend:

Ursay: ... vaguely something is coming to my head about something one of my friends said about like, this girl that she used to date who was more of I guess, the butch type, and she did not trust her at all. Like... the girl didn’t trust my friend. So, she would always be like, you know, just like, harassing her and questioning her, and then it got so bad that the girl accused her of sleeping with someone else, and then like... I can’t...

Interviewer: It's okay...

Ursay: Ah man, the girl accused her of sleeping with someone else and I think what happened was the girl actually like [nervous laughter] somewhat molested her to see if she slept with someone else or something like that, it was crazy.

Ursay describes how her friend was not trusted, and who was subject to being questioned and harassed by her girlfriend. She goes on to describe an escalation from psychological abuse (although she didn't call it that) to rape, explaining that her friend was actually "somewhat molested" when her jealous partner suspected her of having a sexual relationship with someone else. While the use of the word "molested" and Ursay's characterization of the situation as "crazy" points to the seriousness she attributes to it, her discomfort retelling the story and struggle to find the right words is clear. Despite her previous assertion that she'd use the word "abuse" to convey the seriousness of situations involving violence, harassment, or emotional abuse, she did not frame this situation in the context of abuse nor use the word rape. It seemed she was hesitant to even use the word "molested", as she added the qualifier "somewhat" before it, although what she described is in all likelihood a case of intimate partner rape in a lesbian
relationship. Another compelling example that highlights the role of uncertainty and ambiguity around what "counts" as rape occurred in Felicia's interview, after she presents a similar situation where a friend was sexually assaulted. However, Felicia then posed the question to me about whether what happened "counted" as rape. I was surprised to be asked, and didn't offer a direct answer, but a few minutes later she asked again. The need to know if rape is possible between two women was compelling enough to keep searching for an answer by coming back to the question during the course of the interview.

In the cisgender men's focus group, a similar issue arose around uncertainty about what "counts" as rape. Here, topics relate to statutory rape, dating inexperience, and behaviors like "pushing the edges on the other person". For example, one participant asserts that there are differences in the conflicts that occur between straight and queer couples, and indicates the belief that there is more "psychological and sexual abuse" in queer relationships. He qualifies this by saying that sexual abuse, though, is "not very prominent, like where people are being raped," instead,

FG2: There's just someone who is kind of pushing the edges on the other person... I've seen a lot of gay men who had never been in a relationship, just came out of the closet, get into relationships with people who are much older, like myself when I was in high school. I wasn't really in a relationship, but I was seeing a man who was like, 45, and that alone was inappropriate, and that man should have known that I was far too young to be seeing him at all, um, but I think that is most prominent, just people pushing the line of what is appropriate, and not really taking responsibility to say this isn't right, you know. I was 16, he was 45ish. I'm not really sure still, but um, that is rape in itself, also completely inappropriate. Um, and I think that happens a lot more than you think, especially in gay culture just because there is that [problem of] just finding others out there. A lot of people are really inexperienced, other people are very experienced, and um, I don't know... I feel like every relationship I have had is someone who is much more experienced [has more power] which isn't like, a very good feeling, but it's just kind of what happens.
While explicitly noting that rape isn't really prominent, he also suggests that sexually intimate (non-relationships) between people who are in very different places developmentally (in terms of either experience or age) "happen a lot more than you think, especially in gay culture." This is a sentiment echoed by about a quarter of interview and focus group participants. His uncertainty about the use of the word rape is clear when he describes the sexual relationship he had with a forty-five year when he just was sixteen and newly out, saying "I'm not really sure, but um, that is rape in itself."

In the cisgender women's focus group, Lexi points out that "there's a lot of denial" and "not just for the gay community" but everyone, regarding the use of the word "rape." She points to cultural narratives that centralize stranger rape as the cause of people being able to avoid admitting that a rape occurred. Yara responds by saying that "it's such a scary term, that especially if it is somebody that you know, it is easy just to be like, 'no, that's not what it was, it was [something else]'...that you can] just play it down...even if that's what really happened." Lexi continues by saying that people feel like rape is not possible in the context of a relationship, because of the belief that you "owe it to that person to give them something--give it up, sexually" because of traditional notions of what it means to be in a relationship that can be traced back to biblical times. I clarified to ask if she felt this was true for queer couples (given the biblical roots she mentioned) and she replies,

Lexi: Definitely. I mean, there's a lot of people who -- I don't know if you have experienced this [nodding to me] or if you have experienced this [nodding to Yara], but I have known people who think, “oh, the gay community won't accept me unless I have had experience with someone of my same gender, because then I'm not really gay, I could
be pretending and faking it,” and they would like...think that they have to like, go through something to count as gay.

This discussion sheds light on some of the questions raised by the observation offered by the participant in the men's focus group and Seth's narrative, highlighting several common themes. First, it illustrates the power of language, including the general fear of words such as "rape", and the suggestion that rape is not common or possible in LGBTQ relationships. Second, it exemplifies the way cultural ideologies make partner rape (for people of any sexual identity) seem illegitimate. Third, it demonstrates how easy it is to minimize rape by calling it something else (especially if one does not want to admit it happened). Fourth, it speaks to the perception that that if you're in a relationship (or, for some, on a date with someone) you "owe" your partner/date sexual gratification. Lastly, it raises the point that even if you do not want to, if you're LG or B, you may feel compelled to engage in same-sex sexual behavior in order to validate your sexual identity to others.

The last observation listed, about feeling compelled to engage in same-sex sexual behavior, may not amount to rape, but certainly speaks to issues around sexual pressure. The idea that non-heterosexual people need to establish or assert their identity to "the gay community" by "go[ing] through something" sexual, can be understood as a form of sexual pressure unique to queer communities. In this case, the pressure is not necessarily from one's partner, which is how we typically define rape, but a pressure (real or perceived) from "the community" or something external that would put a person in the position of making a constrained choice to engage in a sexual relationship that they may not otherwise engage in. While not often linked to rape or sexual assault by youth, it was a common to hear mention of being in a relationship in order to
"figure out" their identity, or "prove" their identity to others. The source and nature of this pressure to be in a relationship is likely the same as the source of Lexi's comment that you have to "having to go through something" sexual to achieve or legitimate your sexual identity.

The discussion between Lexi and Yara, and that in the men's focus group illustrate similar themes, though the substantive content of the two narratives is quite different. In both, there is a shared sense of something not being quite right, but at the same time, youth are unsure if it's not right. This can be traced back to a lack of clear social scripts for queer relationships. What "counts" as rape or sexual assault is unclear. What youth can expect to happen sexually in queer relationships is also somewhat unclear. This makes the boundary between sexual assault, pressure and rape especially blurry. In the men's focus group, asserting that drastic differences in experience/age between sexual partners is common may be why calling the power differential "inappropriate" feels more accurate than labeling what happened as (statutory) rape.

Preston, a 21-year old, biracial, transgender man, similarly endorses the belief that abuse occurs in queer relationships and that more attention is needed to the issue in all populations. However, despite having a strong handle on language and knowledge of dating abuse, he speaks about being "violated" sexually as opposed to using the term rape or even sexual assault to describe his own experience. Given the lack of specificity, it is unclear which of these terms may have been appropriate, but it raises important questions about how transgender youth communicate about their bodies, gender and sexuality. Speaking of "the dawning realization" of something being "not right" and subsequently noting a "violation" could be a result of a partners' lack of respect for a transgender partner's body-boundaries, Preston says,
Preston: I think as far as um, abuse versus unhealthy, I mean if you are being advanced on and you don't want it... or if they're coming at you and it's, you know, not teasing or playing anymore... [or] if you're making love with your partner and you are doing things that... they don't want you to do versus like, you know... just messing around...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Preston: I mean, you can feel bad and be like, “Oh, well that's not right.” And then you can feel, “Oh, wow, I am being violated”... there's -- like I said, different degrees of what people are comfortable with and not comfortable with.

While the specific question pertained to differences between abuse and an unhealthy relationship, the description of the difference between the feelings: "well that's not right" versus "I am being violated," is still quite vague, although he seems to allude to the role of intent. But the clear message Preston offers is that there are "different degrees of what people are comfortable with," and characterizing his own recognition of what he's comfortable with sexually as being a "dawning realization" suggests that it was not immediately clear for him what his own sexual boundaries may have been, what he felt comfortable with. This is significant in regard to the ambiguity of queer discourses of sexual abuse and rape, perhaps particularly so in transgender communities. Anecdotal evidence from discussions around sex and sexuality at UNITE also indicate a marked uncertainty around safe and healthy relationship and intimate behaviors for transgender youth. In cases where a trans-youth would bring up a question or concern about these issues at UNITE, the response from other youth, peer-educators, and adult advisors was often vague (or sometimes, there was no response, and the question was turned back to the youth). Thus, it seem extremely likely that transgender youth may be especially impacted by uncertainty around what is okay and not okay to expect in regard to their sexual and intimate relationships. When there are two cisgender women, two cisgender men, or one or more
partner who is transgender, the very idea of what would even constitute rape, or sexual assault, or even a "violation" may feel very unclear.

**Identifying and Defining Relationship Violence and Abuse**

There were a minority of youth who made direct connections between what they have experienced or seen in LGBTQ relationships, and their beliefs about intimate partner violence. Although some of these participants also failed to label or contextualize specific examples as "abuse" or "rape" at other points of their narrative, what makes their conceptualization different is a clear connection between hypothetical discussions and real-life experiences. It is important to include discussion of this here, as it illustrates the nature of the connections youth did make to words such as "abuse", "dating violence", and "intimate partner violence". Zane's narrative illustrates such a connection. Ze also offers insight into why violence and abuse may not be visible in the queer community, providing a possible explanation as to why youth tend not to recognize abuse or violence when they do encounter it. Drawing on the educational experience of learning about abuse from a guest speaker at UNITE, Zane explains,

> Zane: When we do hear [about] someone being abused it’s a speaker... It’s not like, it’s not like you’re seeing it first hand because it’s happening first hand... somebody is not going to walk up and say, I’m being emotionally abused. First of all, they might not know they are, and if they are being physically abused they usually try to hide it.

Heyes also defines intimate partner violence in a way that is directly informed by experience, explaining that intimate partner violence occurs,

> Heyes: [When]...one party exerts either physical or emotional control that kind of hinges on a hostile and abusive tactic over another party or person. Um, I think that would speak to you know, physical violence and also, you know, like emo[tonal?]-- like visceral strife. Um, for gay culture I think I would alter it just to emphasize more the emotional portion of it. Because as far as my own experiences with physical violence, I haven't seen
much. But I have seen a good deal of sort of like, social manipulation and um, factors that have more to do with... vulnerability and emotional manipulation.

Another participant, Nate, discusses an experience with an emotionally abusive partner, and early on in the interview explicitly labeled his experience as abuse-which was rare. It may be important that Nate specified that he did not see the abuse as abusive until after the relationship was over, when he began to process the experience in therapy, and with family and friends.

_Friends can be dangerous and abusive._ Another idea that came up a handful of times during interviews and focus groups, as well as during fieldwork with UNITE, was the idea that friends can be dangerous. One of the first suggestions a UNITE youth made after I explained my research was "you should also think about abusive friends." I didn't think to ask why at the time, but as this theme emerged it became apparent there are a variety of possible reasons. One participant noted concern about the possibility a straight friend can manipulate you to "experiment" with sex as a means to figure out their own sexual identity, or use you for sex and then deny it. Another example of why "friends" may be important to look at in the context of relationship abuse was made evident in a different discussion that occurred at UNITE, involving a disclosure of rape. A participant in a secret relationship with someone who was "not out," discussed an incident where his "friend" (the word they used to describe each other as the relationship was secret) raped him in front of other friends. The reason behind the rape seemed to be because he was gay, and the perpetrator made it clear to the friends who saw this happen that he wasn't "friends" with the survivor to any degree. In another variation of this theme, Seth notes there are also dangers "for gay people who like their straight friends" suggesting there is both an emotional and physical threat. Seth explains,
Seth: I feel like it’s like that crush phase that you don’t have elsewhere.

Interviewer: So having crushes on your straight friends and having them react badly? Or take advantage of it?

Seth: Both... I think it happens to a lot of people.

*Language-related misperceptions and the misuse of language.* There was not a consensus on what abuse looks like in queer communities. This is due to a number of factors, including a lack of education or awareness, belief in stereotypes or misperceptions that serve to minimize abuse, a lack of language to explain certain occurrences of abuse, and the misuse or overuse of certain words (e.g. use of the word "abuse" to denote feelings of injustice or hurt). In combination, this makes shared communication about relationship violence difficult. For example, Gabri explains how her education at a UNITE meeting clarified some previous misperceptions she had, saying the meeting "really helped me a lot to like, understand what abuse really is in a relationship... before I kind of thought...if it wasn’t physical then it wasn’t abuse. And I knew obviously it must happen in same-sex relationships, but I never really thought about it as happening as much, for some reason." Another idea is that certain types of abuse, such rape or sexual assault, are either not possible or highly unlikely. Jayla's response to whether she believes rape is possible between two women was "I don’t know…it could probably happen, but I don’t think that’s pervasive. Probably some rare outliers, like, one chick who’s crazy, and had too many, and slipped something in your drink. [Then] you wake up, and you’re like, 'oh, crap!' But I don’t think it would happen often".

Something much less common was the over- or misuse of the word abuse. The nature of this pattern varied significantly. Many youth did not know exactly what constituted abuse, but
had a pretty strong idea, and if they used it to discuss actual examples they used it cautiously. This is in contrast to sentiments expressed by a few youth, who applied the word liberally or inconsistently to a host of behaviors or dynamics (e.g. cheating, neediness) and/or who claimed that abuse was "healthy" or "necessary" (the latter being much less prevalent than the former). However, significant misunderstandings or misapplication of the word "abuse" raise concerns around communication about relationship conflicts and violence. It also minimizes relationship abuse, delegitimizing the experience of people in relationships where patterns of coercive control and violence are present.

For example, a participant in the cisgender male focus group described a relationship between a couple who had the "most violent fights," saying,

FG2: It's this whole thing where all they [are doing] is fighting, hating-on each other and cheating...but somehow it manages to work...So I think some people take the abuse in stride and just consider it as part of their relationship. Maybe even some of that brings them closer together.

Illustrative of his belief that abuse is ubiquitous in relationships, his suggestion that some people "take abuse in stride" and it's possible that abuse may make a relationship stronger indicate that he may be using the word in a different way than how it is typically intended to be used in the context of intimate relationships. In a variation of this theme, Quin claims that abuse is everywhere, citing shared bank accounts or one partner contributing more money to the relationship as examples of financial abuse. The misuse or over-application of the word "abuse" is likely related to a misunderstanding of what constitutes abuse, which can be connected to the lack of social scripts for intimate partner violence in queer relationships, as well as the silence and secrecy that surrounds the issue.
Thus, the seemingly contradictory nature of youth's beliefs and perceptions of queer adolescent dating violence and abuse actually present a relatively cohesive picture. The pattern was consistent: youth believe that it does happen in queer adolescent relationships, although it's not often discussed. The silence around the issue in both dominant and queer communities, combined with a lack of social scripts for what queer relationships should look like (and what they should not include, such as violence, manipulation, sexual pressure, etc.) leave youth without the ability to conceptualize or confidently assert they have experienced or seen abuse (with very few exceptions), despite evidence to the contrary. There were a few notable exceptions. For example, one participant discussed at length a past relationship with escalating patterns of abuse, and directly labeled the situation as abusive. But the more typical pattern of avoiding this type of language or using it inaccurately, is significant because it both reflects and sustains existing social, interpersonal and individual conditions and dynamics of oppression.

The avoidance of language such as "violence", "abuse", and "rape" is related to a few factors. First, misperceptions about relationship and intimate violence, particularly about "what counts" as well as the severity and impact of violence. Second, a lack of social scripts for queer relationship violence, abuse, sexual assault and rape, prevent youth to recognize and label what is happening in queer relationships as abuse, rape, etc. While hypothetically what is occurring in heterosexual relationships where a cisgender woman is being victimized by an intimate partner who is a cisgender man is viewed as "the same" as what ostensibly happens in queer relationships, when similar situations take place in queer relationships, youth tend not to view the situations with the same lens. Further, some youth suggest that what "counts" for queer couples
may be different due to uncertainty about queer relationships. It is also evident that for youth who view (or believe others view) their relationships as less significant, the violence that occurs within them may appear less significant. Perhaps especially so, if social conditions such as a lack of available partners has lowered their expectations, and prompted them to integrate ideas like they ought to "stick it out" even if it things "aren't working" into their worldview. Thus, the use of minimizing language both supports the continued minimization of relationship violence, abuse, sexual assault and rape, as well as reflects beliefs about it. Over- or misuse of the word "abuse" can have the similar effect of concealing the existence of abuse and relationship violence. Not recognizing abuse as abuse has implications for how young people filter, understand and make connections to available information available to adolescents about healthy relationships as well as relationship violence and abuse.

III. "YOU THINK IT DOESN'T ACTUALLY HAPPEN": STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND CULTURAL NORMS

A lack of social scripts for queer relationships and relationship violence is only one example of the way institutionalized forms of inequality, dominant ideologies, and community norms inform and conceal the queer adolescent dating violence. This section draws from key insights of intersectionality theories, that foreground interlocking systems of domination and oppression in analyses of intimate partner violence. Institutionalized heterosexism, homo/bi/transphobia, and ageism intersect in the lives of queer adolescents, and their experiences with dating violence are necessarily mediated by these structural factors. In light of emergent trends from the data, it is clear that queer adolescent experiences with dating violence are subject to the multidimensional
effects of heterosexism, heteronormativity and homo/bi/transphobia. Specifically, their personal experiences with shame and stigma must be understood within a larger system of intersecting inequalities. In dialogue with institutionalized dynamics such as a lack of social scripts, this section focuses on themes relating to community and cultural norms on a macro-level, queer adolescent communities on a more local and specific level, and the role of adolescent friendships and peer groups in youth's negotiations of relationship violence and abuse.

*Lack of Social Scripts for Queer Dating Violence*

The issue of a lack of social scripts has been discussed throughout the chapter as the intersection of LGBTQ-status and age results in a unique pattern for queer youth. Specifically, the result of a lack of dating experience, which youth relate to both age and isolation, makes the implications of lacking social scripts even more profound. This is illustrated in Eli's description of his "bad dating experiences." He describes one in particular, with a bisexual guy he describes as “more mature... like, mentally, [who] had like, already done most things that I hadn’t done yet". He continues, "I was just still kind of new to it, and everything. I knew, like, I didn’t know all the like, physical things.” Aside from being unclear on the logistics of possible variations in male-to-male sexual contact, it seems important that he discusses the maturity of his partner, in contrast to his own immaturity. Eli’s description points to the presence of power imbalances that may present when a less experienced youth has a relationship with a more “mature” partner, who has the power to define the terms of relationships by virtue of their experience with queer dating and the implication that they know what queer dating looks like; and consequently, what is acceptable and not acceptable. Power differentials due to age difference or level of experience is
not an issue limited to queer adolescent relationships. But, inexperience combined with queer adolescents’ lack of access to healthy relationship models, and silence about what queer relationships look like, broaden the scope of risks that can be associated with inexperience.

The lack of social scripts for both queer relationships and the abuse that sometimes occurs within them is significant. It not only opens the door for possible exploitation, and presents challenges around communicating about violence and abuse, but influences how youth conceptualize and understand their experiences. This is troubling as adolescence is where the developmental tasks of identity development as well as learning how to engage in romantic relationship occurs. Due to a lack of prior experience, and a lack of social scripts, it is unsurprising that one of the main findings is that queer youth seem to have an ambiguous picture of what is okay versus not okay in queer relationships. Among others, one of the implications is the proliferation of misperceptions and stereotypes. Youth's desire to be in a relationship (likely related to desires to engage in what is viewed as "typical" behavior during adolescence; desire to share age-appropriate experiences with peers) cause many to make exceptions they otherwise may not, due to fear of not having another option for a dating partner. Shame and stigma also play a role in the "added pressure" of feeling like your relationship represents queer relationships, with some youth reporting fear of making the community look bad if they talk about things that may be bad in their personal relationships.

*Dominant cultural ideologies.* Aside from a simple lack of public discourse in dominant culture about queer adolescent relationships and relationship violence, the messages that are presented about intimate partner violence support the marginalization of queer folks from the
public imagination of what an abusive relationship looks like. One of the participants from the cisgender male focus group specifically links the typical image of a battered woman to the idea that queer relationship violence is "just not there", saying

FG2: Uh, a lot of the abusive relationships that are sort of propagated across the media, they are between a man and a woman; it's the man beating the woman...

Interviewer: Yeah.

FG2: As opposed to in a gay relationship, where it's two men. So you don't kind of have that projection...[to compare it to, so it's like] “Oh, it's just not there.”

It seems a lack of social scripts for queer relationships and the corresponding lack of social scripts for queer relationship violence and abuse may be a contributing factor to the disconnect evident in youth narratives between believing it occurs in the abstract, but failing to characterize or label examples accordingly. For example, Felicia explains,

Felicia: I think it just goes back to the emotional abuse being so hard to define, and especially in lesbians where both females are pretty emotional to begin with, things might be said that in a straight couple would be emotional abuse, but it’s a little more cloudy, in the lesbian couple.

The suggestion that incidents of physical violence can be explained as "fighting," and even justified using that rationale, points to larger issues that stem from a lack of clear definitional dialogues. Jayla, for example, argues that there are "various levels of violence...with all relationships", and continues by saying "some things are okay." As an example, she notes, "one of my best friends... she gets randomly violent, and she’ll hit her girlfriend, and I’m like: 'that’s not okay. Especially because you’re so small, you need to be careful.'" In this case, Jayla is not saying it "not okay" to hit, but that it's worrisome to her that the woman doing the hitting is smaller. This is a distorted reflection of heteronormative social scripts for IPV, suggesting the
real issue isn't the violence, but instead that the (assumedly) smaller person is more vulnerable to violence; further assuming that the bigger or stronger person will react to physical assault by physically assaulting their partner, which is a stereotype many people have about same-sex intimate partner violence. This supports the idea Jayla voiced earlier, which is that relationship violence between people of the same gender is a "fight" and somehow more "fair". This suggests a clear lack of language to talk about violence and abuse, due to a lack of social scripts that firmly establish that hitting one's partner, or being "randomly violent" is not healthy and could be indicative of abuse. It is safe to say, that like Kevin who argued that the slapping and emotional abuse he saw occur in his lesbian friend's relationship, Jayla may have a different interpretation of "random violence" if the gender of the partners in the relationship were different.

*Lack of awareness.* The lack of awareness around queer adolescent relationship violence was often cited as a significant issue, as Preston puts it, "it's a really important topic that is not talked about enough." This issue is clearly linked to silence in both dominant culture, as well as queer communities themselves. In a similar vein, Seth points out, "there’s not much for LGBT out there. You kind of find your own way," highlighting one effect of the pervasive silence around queer dating violence. The silence and resulting lack of awareness around the issue of queer intimate partner violence is evident in a variety of ways in youth narratives, but particularly illustrative in two examples of youth discussing intimate partner rape. Lexi and Kevin both describe experiences friends told them about involving unwanted sexual activity, and the process whereby they linked the word/concept of rape to the situation is made transparent. In
the context of thinking about it during the interview, they both realized that the situations likely count as rape. Lexi explains,

Lexi: ...the real definition of the word 'rape' means to take something from someone without their consent. So in that sense, I definitely think it was. Because I mean, he was forcing him to do things he didn't want to do, and even though he like, let it happen, I mean, he really didn't want it to, and he only did it because he was [pressured]. So in that sense I really do consider it rape.

Interviewer: When it was happening, did you think about it like that?

Lexi: I didn't really... I mean, I was worried about my friend but I didn't think like, “Oh, it is rape.” Like, no one used that word because they were like, “Oh, but he says it's okay.” ... So...I didn't really kind of think that way until like, right now... I mean like, even if he didn't make him go all the way it is -- and even if it's not rape -- it is just such a terrible thing to like, control someone like that.

Lexi first concludes that she definitely considers it rape, because her friend didn't want whatever happened to happen. At the same time, she qualifies it in a way, by adding a comment to the effect of "even if it's not rape...". Kevin on the other hand does not qualify his characterization, but similarly evidences a disconnection between his thoughts of sexual abuse/rape and actual encounters with it in the context of same-sex relationships. He first explains, "I haven’t really thought about [sexual abuse being an issue in the community] but it makes perfect sense that it would be... I probably know people who have been sexually abused, but who don’t know...I know…one of my friends has [but] …no one has completely told me". He then comes back to the topic, saying

Kevin: I actually think…I would say one of my friends: they were forced. Two girls. I’m pretty sure that…I always thought [she was] raped, or sexually assaulted of some sort.

Interviewer: Could you describe that?
Kevin: I remember being told that one of their friends came over, and they had been really good friends, and they had been hanging out a lot or whatever, and all of a sudden, she just kept saying no, and it just kept happening, and it wouldn't stop. I won’t get into details, but it was obviously a huge struggle, and it made her feel completely awful and everything, just like in any rape situation. Just because there isn’t penetration, whenever there is unwanted action, it is going to make that person feel awful or feel out of control.

Silence in Queer Culture

Kevin also raises another important idea that quite a few participants noted relating to stigma on the community level when he continues, "and I guess also maybe [it's not talked about] for political reasons from our own community." Lexi makes a similar point, saying

Lexi: If it doesn't happen to you, you never think about it because it just doesn't occur to you... you think it doesn't actually happen. Especially in a community where... we are already so ostracized that we figure, “oh, we are all [happy and about] love".

The stigmatization of queer communities within dominant society is also cited by Felicia as a possible source of not only ignorance regarding intimate partner violence, but similar to Kevin's suggestion, the reason for wanting to suppress the existence of intimate partner violence. Kevin points to "political reasons", while Felicia explains, it may be because there is already so much pressure and stigma on the relationship that there isn't a need to "add another set of eyes" from within the community. She says,

Felicia: ...there’s so much outside prejudice that the inside group doesn’t want to add some kind of pressure if there is something going on... So it kind of makes me weary thinking about that, because, if there’s some kind of relationship that’s not healthy for the two people, um, in the gay community it's... it's kind of like--let them be--maybe, and let them figure it out because they already all the other pressures of life, they don’t need us telling them what to do, it’s like, leave them alone.

Felicia raises an interesting point, as she reflects back on what makes her "weary"; thinking about the possibility that unhealthy or abusive relationships may be overlooked, and go
unchallenged, within communities because peers who know the pressures they already face, do not want to add more pressure, shame or stigma to the relationship. Hesitance to talk about relationship conflict and violence was another significant theme that relates to the pervasive silence around queer relationships violence and abuse.

*Dynamics of Queer Youth Communities*

The institutionalization of silence and secrecy around queer intimate partner violence has a direct effect on the silence that occurs on interpersonal levels within queer youth communities. As illustrated above by Felicia, one theme spoke to youth's desire to distance themselves from the relationship violence or abuse occurring in the relationships of their friends. The reasons for this were not because of disregard for the safety and well-being of their friends. Instead, youth are not able to assess the seriousness of a situation, do not know what to say, and are unsure whether it would help or hurt to say anything. The existing pattern of silence around the issue and the private nature of dating and romantic relationships also contribute to the perpetuation of societal silence around intimate partner violence on interpersonal and community levels.

For example, Seth speaks to the effect of silence around queer relationships that conveys the idea that "nothing is...taboo in the community," further noting that individuals may be hesitant to voice concerns, which in turn may enable abusers to continue being abusive.

Seth: I don’t know, like, I feel like nothing is kind of taboo in the community so they don’t really want to bring it up. No one wants to be the person to bring it up and the person who doesn’t get reprimanded, they just, I don’t think what they’re doing isn’t wrong, but they’re like, “No one’s ever said anything.”

In a similar manner, Nate discusses the silence around violence in the community in his example of hearing about abuse in relationships indirectly, through other friends. He elaborates,
Nate: I am not supposed to know about [them, as they're] kept really under the table and stuff..." and continues, "my best friend told me about his friends' [relationship violence], like, no one is supposed to know about it or whatever, but he was asking me because [he wanted to know] what was mentally going through my head when I was being treated like shit.

Failure to address relationship violence occurring within individual communities, and within communities of friends, may indicate a kind of tacit approval for that type of behavior. If no one points out violent or abusive behaviors, labels them as abusive, or makes it clear abuse is unacceptable; it sends a subtle message that it is okay. Or, as Seth points out, something one can get away with. Jayla specifically notes that it's "weird" to "hit your girlfriend" but in a demonstration of how violence is minimized, explains it's "sort of accepted". There is a difference between unhealthy relationships where both individuals are not experiencing personal growth and are causing harm to one another, versus a pattern of power and control whereby one partner exerts and maintains control over the other partner. The concern here is that young people cannot see inside the relationships of their friends, to know if there is a pattern of escalating coercive control and violence, and thus tacit acceptance (through silence) of any violence contributes to a cultural climate that appears to condone violent and abusive behaviors. The lack of available social scripts position some young people to be even more vulnerable to exploitation, and in conjunction survivors are more likely to be blamed for their inaction where it is the perpetrator who should be compelled to stop abusing.

*Addressing powerlessness by exerting power.* Experiences with violence and abuse (however they are characterized or labeled by youth) were, however, linked to power in some
ways. For example, Jayla observes that some people feel powerful by enacting power over their partner, saying

Jayla: …if you have one person who’s super in love with you, but know you don’t care about them, but you’re in a relationship with them, you feel you have more leeway to do certain things, and they’ll be okay, because they love you, and you’re just like: “I don’t really like you, but this is what it is”.

In the first focus group with Lexi and Yara, the two women discuss a similar perception about the possibility of feeling powerful by taking advantage of a dating partner. Yara wonders if there's "just like a whole group of people" that "go after newly outed individuals...and just kind of make them...their person," suggesting that being hurt in a relationship seems to prompt "a lot of girls" to be "overly thrilled at...a new, outed person" because, as she puts it, it's "like, “Yes, I can make you what I want!”", Lexi goes on to add, "It's like a defense mechanism". The conversation continues,

Interviewer: [You've seen this] happen?

Yara: Yeah, like you have a chance with somebody who hasn't exp[erienced, or] -- been with anybody, or hasn't really -- like, they know what they are attracted to -- but never really went for it, so you have got the opportunity to kind of like, make new experiences with this person and kind of, formulate them to be like, what you want them to be. I think it's totally wrong, but I feel like there's a group of people that do that.

Yara: And that once the person they're with wakes up, there might be like a reality check for both of them. But yeah, it's just really unfortunately. It is easy to be taken advantage of if you don't really -- it's like new territory.

Lexi: Especially when you don't have the network of support... [Yara: Yeah, exactly] ...that most people get.

Lexi frames this as a "defense mechanism"--ostensibly against the fear of being hurt again, but in light of theories of intimate partner violence that embed interpersonal violence in larger systems
of inequality, can likely be read also as an indication of the way institutionalized homo/bi/transphobia and systemic oppression causes individuals to feel powerless, and attempt to gain a sense of power by dominating their partner. The idea that more experienced queer folks may take advantage of newly outed queer folks was brought up by number of other participants. While the power dynamic was not explicitly mentioned in many narratives, it was alluded to by more than a few, and resonates with theoretical explanations for the perpetration of intimate partner violence.

Seth makes a similar observation about power, alluding to his feeling of powerlessness around his perception that in gay culture you can't just date; that there's no courtship phase. In his explanation we can see him grappling with the idea of using someone, saying

Seth: I’ve been trying to like, just date. Try things out but it’s not that easy.

Interviewer: What makes it hard?

Seth: The other person. There’s kind of like morals that I start thinking of, like should I sleep with this person if I don’t really like them? Should I even date them? And it’s hard. Do I want the experience or do I want to use them? Is kind of in the back of the mind.

In this case, the word "power" is not used, but it is clear that his choice is embedded in a context where he has the ability to do to someone else what he expressed caused hurt to him.

Community Norms and Constrained Choices

This category contains themes that speak to norms, values and beliefs about queer communities, and reports of youth making constrained choices. These choices were around dating and intimate relationships that in some cases viewed by youth as freely made choices, but in a broader context can be seen as influenced by perceptions (or misperceptions) about queer
communities. These constrained choices varied among youth, and were situation-specific, but were united by the common fact that a different choice may have been made if not for the limitations youth identified as relating to some aspect of queer communities and culture. For example, one theme presented in the previous chapter focused on youth's feelings of isolation and the perception that there is a limited number of options for people to date. Some of the youth who talked about this dynamic indicated that it may cause people to stay longer in a relationship than they otherwise would have, or accept behaviors or differences that they otherwise may not have made compromises on.

This is indirectly related to relationship violence and abuse, in the sense that it may be a factor some young people who are in violent relationships, and are considering leaving or trying to leave, take into consideration--at least this is a perception voiced by some participants. While narratives do not point to this as direct example of a constrained choice leading to or creating a situation that may make one more vulnerable to relationship abuse, it illustrates a choice made within certain constraints that can be linked to queer culture or communities. A more direct example is evident in the previously discussed excerpt from Seth's narrative, where he voices the idea that in order to date, you have to know you are making the choice to put yourself in a situation where you may be "choosing" to have sex even if you otherwise would not.

*Conflict between community norms and expectations.* The general sentiment that you have to engage in relationships a certain way, or present yourself in a certain manner in order to be attractive to others, likely has varying degrees of legitimacy across communities and over time. Yet the way youth who report this feeling of pressure from "the community" talk about it
seems to mimic the pattern of relationship abuse. Perceived or real community expectations have negative physical and emotional effects. These expectations can be seen in youth's discussions of feeling the need to express their gender in certain ways, change their appearance in order to appear more attractive to others, engage in risky sexual behavior, and comply with the idea that queer relationships move so quickly that there is "no courtship period". They function as a form of social control for some queer youth, and represents a form of institutionalized violence that is mirrored in dominant culture. In light of the previous discussion about power, "defense mechanisms", and feelings of powerlessness, it is crucial to recognize the role that violence in dominant and community culture plays in creating a context where power inequalities are experienced in a myriad of ways. With the possible result of an individual attempting to regain a sense of power through control in intimate relationships. Nate, for example, discusses a period of time where he felt that engaging sexually with other men would help him feel better about being rejected sexually by his abusive ex-boyfriend. In his description, he offers a valuable insight into one of the ways youth make compromises, or constrained choices, that impact the quality and safety of their romantic and intimate relationships as a result of community norms or perceptions about queer culture. He explains,

Nate: My reaction when I had that unprotected sex was first of all, “Oh my God, oh my God, [laughter] that was the dumbest thing I have ever done.” And second of all that I was totally miserable that it didn't make me happy or feel attractive at all. It made me feel gross...I think when people -- especially gay guys -- detach themselves from sex...[well] I think a lot of people at a deeper level [really] want to be in love and feel affection. I know one of my best friends, does like this crazy sex thing all the time, and he's not happy. He wants a boyfriend and he wants to feel that love, but when you just go clubbing and disconnect your physical self from your emotional self that much, it almost becomes like a habit, like permanent because that's just who you become, you don't realize how [un]happy you are.
Seth speaks to a similar issue, but draws a contrast between community pride and individual pride. He discusses the impact of community norms on self-esteem in the context of describing his first sexual experience with another man. He notes it was with a straight co-worker, saying "it’s just like... like there’s no possibility at all [for dating or a relationship] so it can leave you like, 'Oh, what was that?'." Seth continues by saying, "I feel like there’s no, [well, not no] self-awareness... but [lessons] for self-esteem. Like, pride [as a community] does not foster individual pride." This, in conjunction with reports from at least five of the cisgender gay men who participated in this study who reported feeling "used" or spiritually broken after sexual engagement in the context of what they suggest is "gay male culture", points to the complexity of belief in community norms, the affirmation and development of the whole self as a person (not just a sexual being) and a lack of self-esteem. This makes young people vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation; or vulnerable to patterning future relationships in ways that mimic exploitative patterns drawn from community and cultural norms.

These types of constrained choices made within the context of beliefs about what is acceptable in queer or certain sub-cultures within LGBTQ communities, are also linked to a lack of experience, and a lack of social scripts that make it appear that there are no boundaries. Examples presented in this section speak to a larger theme relating to constrained choices youth appear to make in a context where there is a lack of social scripts for relationships, relationship abuse, and rape, and under the pressure of wanting to be in a relationship but feeling as though there are limited options, among other structural, cultural and community-based constraints. This
is an important dynamic to recognize in attempts to understand youth's presentation of their choices around intimate relationships.

*Misperceptions and Stereotypes*

A lack of awareness, and silence in both dominant and queer communities fosters a culture where misperceptions and stereotypes about relationship violence, abuse, abusers, and survivors go unchallenged. Misperceptions and false beliefs about queer relationship violence were common in youth narratives, however the specific misperceptions varied in nature and some youth voiced more misperceptions, false beliefs, and stereotypes than others. The more common misperceptions, false beliefs, or stereotypes (e.g., were mentioned by two or more youth) are provided below to exemplify the forms they took.

*About the nature and effect of abuse.* Some youth reported general misperceptions about the nature and cause of abuse--as well as it's effects. For example, at least three participants claimed that it's possible that abuse is either normal, or even good, for relationships. This is illustrated in excerpts from Jayla's narrative discussed in the previous section, and evidenced by the likes of Quin's rationale that abuse just works for some people, it brings them together, like sharing a checking account. Quin explains, "specific couples have to argue, the same way that couples have to have sex in order for like, the relationship to be okay," ultimately concluding, that "to maintain a healthy relationship, there might have to be some abuse." A second general misperception pertained to what actually constitutes abuse. Preston explains that it's hard to see where the line is, saying, abuse "can go so deep... the line is so fine, it's hard to see."
About survivors and perpetrators. Other false beliefs and misperceptions had to do with ideas about survivors and perpetrators. A common misperception is the idea that abuse or rape would never happen to them (or their friends) because they are too in control, perceptive, or have higher self-worth than survivors of violence. Marie explains, "I think most of my friends are good at realizing [if] they aren't in a good place in their relationships and they leave." Heyes expresses a similar sentiment, but notes that it actually did happen to him, saying, "I would never give anyone that sort of up power to exert over me. But for whatever reason... I gave it to him." Linking victimization to a quality or behavior specific to the survivor illustrates a false belief that the source of the problem is the survivor, and not the actions of the perpetrator. Another stereotype youth touched on relates mostly to physical forms of violence and the idea of "mutual abuse;" which functions to erase the possibility of abuse in same-sex relationships by framing all violence as "fair" because there is no gender-difference that would make it unfair.

About the causes of abuse. One of main misperceptions based on a stereotype is the idea that abuse is the result of mental health issues. Having mental illness, trauma or some form of temporary "break" were offered as explanations for the behavior of perpetrators of violence. Likewise either, the victim is "crazy" or has some type of problem was also expressed. For example, Quin, notes "I think normal people are starting to realize like, you know, there are ways that they can help themselves with it." The use of the word "normal" in this context highlights an underlying suggestion that with more resources available to help themselves, it is only abnormal people who won't make good use of them and thus be victims of intimate partner abuse. Victim-blaming was common, and the use of the word "crazy" to describe perpetrators and survivors
was also common. Another misperception about the cause of abuse is that it's a result of frustration, Caleb concludes, "which is why people need to go to the gym or something". The idea that frustration can lead to an abusive relationship obscures the pattern of power and control that characterizes relationship abuse and dating violence. All of these misperceptions, false beliefs, and stereotypes are harmful to youth, and harmful to queer youth communities, as they service to distort, conceal, or condone violence and abuse in relationships--and specifically make it harder for people in abusive situations to recognize abuse, communicate about it without shame, and feel confident they can find or seek help if they choose to.

IV. "YOU KIND OF HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY": INTERSECTIONALITY AND ABUSE

This section illustrates the complex intersection of dynamics relating to age, sexuality and gender, highlighting the interrelationship of social context (particularly sexual and gender minority stress) and the developmental stages and tasks in adolescence. LGBTQ youth are uniquely positioned in situations where the shame and stigma of victimization intersect with shame and stigma relating to identity or relationship concerns. Both were cited as reasons why youth felt they may not have heard about violence or abuse occurring in friends' relationships, as well as motivation to keep quiet about relationship issues or experiences with violence in their own relationships.

*Barriers to seeking support: Fears related to minority stress.* Youth expressed the worry that other people won't accept or recognize queer relationship abuse (or as another youth puts it, take queer "relationship issues seriously"). As Quin puts it, that is "a huge problem... we don't
think that other people will really accept it as abuse." Fear that others will not take their experiences with abuse seriously is an added barrier for individuals and communities impacted by interpersonal and structural violence. This theme also emerged in relation to young people's thoughts and behaviors regarding concerns about the relationships of queer friends. For example, Lexi describes a situation that occurred in high school, where she and her friend group were concerned about a cisgender gay man who was clearly in an abusive relationship. As she walks through the process of what informed her decision not to speak to an adult or anyone else about the situation, stigma relating to sexual minority status was central,

Interviewer: Did you -- did your friends -- or hear anyone like, try to talk to adults, or was it like you definitely...

Lexi: Well, I definitely (I don't know about any of my other friends) but I couldn't go to my mom because ...she is very religious of course, and she wouldn't have any of that. She would be like, “It's gross, get away”.

Lexi: ...and I mean, I don't know anyone who is actually that close with teachers that they can tell them this kind of things, and like I said, I don't know about them but I'm pretty sure none of them were like, openly out...so [if anyone] brought this up, [it] would open up a whole world of other things that they probably weren't ready to talk about yet...

Lexi: So probably that's why no one else really even tried to reach out. I know I didn't -- I definitely didn't try, I didn't want to go there.

Family acceptance or rejection was an important theme relating to sexual and gender minority stress in general, and it is significant that there was only one youth who specified they would feel comfortable talking to a parent about a relationship issue or an abusive relationship, and he specified that he only would if it were "a straight relationship". Many youth explicitly noted that they would not be able to talk to a parent, due to fear of rejection, violence, shaming, or a lack of understanding.
Shame, Stigma, and LGBTQ Victims

One of the more serious effects of stigma and the internalization of homo/bi/transphobia emerged in the interview with Jayla, who described a situation where a friend who had been sexually assaulted by her female partner seemed to fear her parents' reaction to such an extent that she lied about the assault. Here, it is clear that the participant and/or her friend seemed to view rape in the context of sex and sexuality, as opposed to an attempt to assert power and control; and feared her parents may react to the gender of her attacker. It is likely the survivor also felt shame as a victim of sexual assault, but the participant emphasized the shame and stigma associated with same-sex sexuality. Explaining she heard about it only because a friend had convinced the survivor to report the assault to school administrators, Jayla says of her friend,

Jayla: Because she [the survivor] was so scared, she didn’t want her parents to find out, so she kind of lied about it…

Interviewer: She didn’t want her parents to know that it was a woman [who attacked her]?

Jayla: Right, that it was a woman.

While likely a combination of fear and shame common to many survivors of sexual assault, the participant clearly attributes being "scared" to the fact that her woman-friend was sexually assaulted by someone of the same gender. Thus, regardless of whether the participant's assessment is true, this example demonstrates how the stigma associated with victimization intersects with the stress and stigma of identity/same-sex sexuality.

Stigma, shame, and resulting fear of disclosing or discussing violence and abuse with others, was not only attributed to sexual minority or transgender status. In some cases, it was not
clear what the exact origin was of the desire to hide or conceal the abuse occurring in one's relationship. For example, Gabri points out that it is hard to know what is going on in some one else's relationship "because people might not come out with it and say it". Other youth participants were more direct in referencing the embarrassment, shame and stigma associated with being victimized by their partner. This specifically positions the topic itself as undesirable, indicating the silence and reluctance to talk about it cannot solely be attributed to issues that relate specifically to the queer aspect of it, although minority stress clearly mediates many experiences and negotiations of violence.

**Resistance to Intimate Partner Violence Agencies**

A number of youth spoke about the stereotypes and stigma they perceived others (outside LGBTQ communities as well as within LGBTQ communities) have about queer relationships and abuse. This proved to be the most significant factor in whether or not they would consider seeking help from an intimate partner violence agency. For example, while Olivia claims there is no difference between straight and not straight couples experiencing intimate partner violence, she asserts she would definitely seek different sources of help for a person in an abusive same-sex relationship. Olivia explains,

Olivia: ... different people have different needs, and not all sources would be as helpful as others. I don’t know if there is an LGBTQ domestic violence support group, but if there was that would be better than normal…heterosexual domestic violence groups.

Interviewer: Why do you think they would be better?

Olivia: Because I feel like they would understand it more, and they would give better advice.

Other participants voiced similar concerns about IPV agencies, although responses to this
particular question about the likelihood of formal help-seeking yielded a range of answers. Many, like Olivia, said they would be hesitant to go to an agency that was not specifically geared toward queer populations. One participant clarified, saying they would not want to go somewhere if the relationship (versus the fact that it is a gay relationship) was not the primary focus. Others note they do not know any queer-friendly IPV agencies in the area. Others still explained they never had an occasion where they, or a friend, would have benefitted so they hadn't really thought about it. When asked about support, most youth suggested their first option would be to go to their friends for help.

Limitations of Friends as Sources of Support

Some queer adolescents have had to cultivate and rely on informal support networks composed of friends and peers due to a lack of adequate structural support. Thus, friend-relationships in particular seem to serve as an important protective factor for some queer youth. Alternately, it is possible that friend-relationships may function as informal support networks in certain instances—such as when facing harassment at school—and not in others, such as dating violence situations where both partners share the same network of friends, or if a youth feels as though they cannot trust their friends. Most participants indicated that their friends would be the first place they would look to for support, but a fair number indicated some reservations about doing so, as well as discussed reasons why they would not feel comfortable or able to support a friend they were worried about.

Seth notes that his main source of support is his friends, but later in the interview explains that he doesn't really feel comfortable talking to them. Similarly, Reed notes that there
may be a disconnect between straight and gay people in terms of communicating about relationship issues. Explaining that the "sexual" aspect of it is only a piece, he wonders "if it’s a two-way street... if a straight couple can rely on homosexual friends for that support that homosexual can’t really get from heterosexual friends." Britt points to a different issue, saying she doesn't talk about her relationship with friends because she fears it may make them uncomfortable. Given the centrality of peers during adolescence, and the limitations placed on other potentials of relationship or relationship violence support, this is especially problematic. Jayla's narrative points to yet another way this issue emerges, saying that while she'd probably go to her closest friends if she experiences problems in her relationships, "it’s kind of weird when you have relationship problems, you don’t want to tell anyone that you are having a problem."

She continues,

Jayla: But also you don’t know who you can trust, so...

Interviewer: Trust to support you? Or the sexuality part?

Jayla: Not just the sexuality part, but to support you. You’re always afraid that your friends are going to say: “we understand, but that person is right…” You know, your friend’s always right, and you’re like: “I guess…” So it’s kind of just, like, hesitant to talk about that.

Here, Jayla makes it clear that the issues around misunderstanding and trust some youth talk about are not always attributable to sexuality, but to support more generally; the idea that your friend might take the other person's side. They may delegitimize your experience, or even re-assign blame to you as opposed to your partner. Not knowing if you can trust or rely on friends, whether due to fear of embarrassing them, fear of misunderstanding due to sexuality or being
transgender, or as the result of non-LGBTQ-related issues constitute a clear theme of youth feeling as though they want to, but can't, go to friends for support.

There is evidence of further limitations of relying on friends for support. A variety of reasons were voiced for not wanting or deciding not to intervene when worried about a friend's well-being in a relationship. Some are attributable to things like the insular nature of some queer friend-groups, where a friend may be hesitant to step in because they are close to both parties. Others relate to age and inexperience, with youth simply not knowing what to do, not feeling confident they have the skills to help or worrying they will alienate their friend, or feeling as though they do not know the whole story. As Kevin explains,

Kevin: Although I have been worried about a few of my friends, specifically one bisexual girl with an affinity for homophobic guys, I find that if I get myself involved and overly concerned, nothing good will come of it. My friends are adults capable of making their own decisions, and, unless in the case of abuse (which I have yet to see in an LGBTQ relationship), it isn't my job to interfere.

Lexi's description of the situation detailed above also speaks to this. She describes how she and her friends suspected abuse, but were afraid to say anything because they did not want to run him off. She goes on to say,

Lexi: Everyone who was helping him when he was having these problems, we were my age, we were all high schoolers... So it was like, yeah, he had us, but like, if we're all in the same boat as him, how is he going to trust our opinion.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, so like, being single, being young...

Lexi: Yeah, because like, we don't know much more, we're not that experienced, we don't even really know how to handle like, a problem in the relationship because we have our own problems.
Helping friends is also complicated by the fact that a number of youth recognize people in abusive relationship may feel ashamed and try to hide it. Nate's experience confirms that this was true for him. He reports that none of his friends said anything while the abuse was happening because he "would lie if [his boyfriend] ever did anything wrong...or ignored [him] or something." He continues, "I would tell them the opposite." He later discusses how when things got really bad, his friends did try to help, and he lost friendships because he felt betrayed. While he explains that he now understands, at the time it made him feel more isolated. This example is unique given the severity of the abuse that occurred in Nate's relationship, but it suggests youth's worries and concerns about trying to step in may not be unfounded, and raises questions about how youth may be able to both provide relationship support while maintaining friendships.

_Ties Between Dating, Adolescent Development, and Violence_

Some youth reported feeling as though they were developmentally delayed in the area of dating and relationships, and thus as older adolescents and young adults, were at a relative disadvantage. Youth discussed how isolation from queer communities and other LGBTQ people in high school made it so they did not have the same dating experiences as their heterosexual peers. Other factors included not being out, not feeling confident, or not knowing about their sexuality as teenagers, or particularly common for transgender youth, feeling unsure or scared to engage romantically or sexually with others, or feeling uncomfortable talking about being transgender to potential partners. College-aged adolescents living away from home for the first time voiced concerns related to "being new at it" in a context where you are not under your parent(s)' control (or protection), and you have much more time and freedom.
A male focus group participant points to the need to develop maturity in order to be able to be single, as opposed to settling for a less than desirable or harmful relationship just to avoid being alone. He explains,

FG2: if you [haven't] developed that maturity, if you haven't gone through a couple of heartbreaks, you can't imagine just being single. [You can't imagine not saying] it was pretty crappy today, but I have a boyfriend. I have done [that] a lot... I'm like, "Oh, they're shit, but someone is dating me, so whatever".

In addition to highlighting the importance of the role of maturity and experience for successfully navigating adult relationships, he also points to another issue that results from being LGBTQ and an adolescent: the impact of sexual minority stress on one's self-concept. Feelings of low self-esteem or self-worth cannot be addressed through romantic relationships, which is part of what the youth above is speaking to when he rationalizes staying with someone who's "shit" because it makes him feel better that someone is dating him.

As suggested in the previous chapter, adolescence is a very important time for identity development, and if young people feel both pressure to be in a relationship to "prove" their sexuality (either to themselves or others), or because a relationship makes their sexual identity feel more legitimate or normal, they may be more vulnerable to becoming involved in what could be exploitative relationships. Yara directly links identity issues, feelings of insecurity, and domestic violence, essentially saying it's not clear how they are related, but they are, explaining:

Yara: The whole -- the domestic violence thing occurs because people like, have these gender role issues... [and then] just being insecure in general... there's a lot of things and they're all connected, but they're all disconnected. [It's] a lot of stuff going on.
A focus group participant likewise points to a lack of social scripts, a lack of boundaries, and a lack of self-efficacy, in his description of why he decided to "just go along" with something he felt uncomfortable with, saying,

   FG2: I feel like [gay relationships] are a lot more open.... And I have had some -- I've had one kink in particular sprung on me that I was very uncomfortable with, but I felt like, well, [I've already done this one thing]...that's bad enough, I just should just go along with it... I just feel like that is another part of a gay relationship that um, is very different from heterosexual relationships

   Interviewer: So pressure...

   FG2: Yeah, and just like [there's something that's] already...bad enough, you know? [So] like, let's [just] do something more.

   *Perceptions of queer relationships.* Emergent patterns pertaining to queer adolescent relationships include the perception that they are typically marked by some degree of secrecy, occur at an accelerated pace, and are often sustained by fears of being alone as opposed to desire to be with the specific person, relate both to social conditions of inequality as well as age and experience. Thus, understanding the context of dating relationships in this sense, and understanding why some youth may stay in bad or unhealthy (although perhaps not abusive) relationships offers some insight into factors that may also contribute to staying in controlling, violent or abusive relationships.

   The silence and secrecy around queer adolescent dating violence in both queer culture at large, and within youth communities of friends and peers has a significant impact on youth's ability to conceptualize and recognize abuse, their level of comfort talking about relationship issues with queer friends, and their ability to identify and access queer-affirmative information, resources and support networks. Examining issues relating to lack of awareness due to dominant
cultural ideologies and marginalization, queer community norms, and the stigma and shame due to sexual minority stress and violent victimization, help explain how certain community dynamics (like certain cultural dynamics in dominant culture) contribute to a culture conducive to violence.

V. DISCUSSION

The results presented here are intended to centralize the experiences and perceptions of queer adolescents, whose voices have largely been excluded from IPV scholarship. At the same time, it is important for scholars to interpret and integrate these findings with existing IPV scholarship, as results showcase factors that are universal, as well as dynamics that are unique or more salient for LGBTQ adolescent populations. For example, both sociological and feminist perspectives recognize the influence of social structural elements (particularly systemic power inequalities) on intimate partner violence (Anderson 1997; Gelles 1997; Goetting 1999; Yllo 2005). While sexual and gender minority stress may be especially salient in discussions of LGBTQ adolescent experiences and perceptions of IPV, social-situational stress and coping theories (theories developed in response to IPV scholarship centralizing cisgender heterosexual couples) indicate how structural stress (e.g. unemployment, limited access to education, illness) combined with cultural approval of violence, position abuse and violence as a viable means of coping with situational stress (Gelles 1997:128). In a global sense then, the role of stress, specifically stress resulting from systemic inequalities, can understood as a possible universal factor pertinent to
IPV: one that spans cultural and community identification. At the same time, the unique stress processes in LGBTQ populations require targeted attention, as the nature and extent of its effect may lead to varied results and have implications for understanding IPV in LGBTQ adolescent relationships.

*Social inequalities and power dynamics.* In contrast to Adelman and Hea Kil's (2007) observation that (heterosexual) adolescent “romances are at once privatized…yet, in practice, are conducted in the public square of school,” these findings indicate that for many queer youth, shame and secrecy make relationships less public than those of their heterosexual peers (1309). This is both a result of structural inequalities and interpersonal factors that impact queer youth and the way their relationships function. Power dynamics embedded in social institutions impact queer youths' freedom to openly engage family and friends around relationship and identity issues. Accordingly, structural inequalities prove to impact youth's engagement with romantic and sexual partners on multiple levels. Not only do social inequalities result in interpersonal and individual experiences of sexual and gender minority stress, but experiences with institutionalized and symbolic forms of anti-LGBTQ violence, highlight the importance recognizing the role of systemic oppression in relation to LGBTQ adolescent dating violence and abuse.

*Minority stress.* Sexual and gender minority stress, the role of dating experience and developmental issues, and other conditions related to the marginalization of queer relationships and isolation (e.g. a lack of social scripts for queer dating) contribute to a context where queer youth have an unclear picture of what relationship and sexual violence and abuse looks like.
Even if certain it does occur, there is a clear disconnect between how youth perceive these situations or incidents, and how they discuss and frame violence and abuse in queer adolescent relationships. The sense that something may not be right, or that they (or their friend) may need outside help, was most often met with silence. This was largely attributed to a real or perceived lack of social support, uncertainty about whether or not what was happening actually "counted" as abusive and thus warranted outside help, fears of further victimization or rejection, and simply not knowing where to even seek help if they wanted to in the first place.

In one of the few recent qualitative studies of queer adolescent intimate partner violence, Gillum and DiFulvio (2012) report very similar results in relation to the role of shame and stigma, concluding:

> Homophobia results in a silencing of sexual minority identities in social discourse about violence. This silencing serves to maintain heterosexual dominance and thereby further alienate sexual minority youth. The lack of same-sex models makes it difficult for youth to know what abuse looks like or leads to a minimization of abuse that may occur in a dating relationship. (P. 732)

Many of the results presented in this chapter support their conclusion. Other shared findings indicate that youth feel less equipped or less able to communicate and control experiences in relationships, and are more willing to make compromises— including compromises around potentially abusive behavior. These findings, too, resonate with other research suggesting that sexual minority youth feel less control in romantic relationships and fear they will never find the ideal partner or relationship (Diamond and Lucas 2004).

Adolescent development. There are clearly dynamics common to both queer and cisgender/heterosexual adolescents in terms of adolescent development, romantic relationships,
and relationship violence. However, there are also areas where the social context, interpersonal experiences, and individual-level negotiations of LGBTQ-related issues and relationships prove to significantly alter the experiences and choices of LGBTQ adolescents. Sexual and gender minority stress intersects with developmental issues central to adolescence. Identity development, the role of peers, and the role of families emerged as significant dynamics in adolescents romantic relationships and negotiations of relationship conflicts and violence.

Interpersonal perspectives such as attachment theory suggest romantic relationships can facilitate the transition to adulthood by beginning the "redistribution of attachment-related functions" earlier in life (Collins et al. 2009:634). As suggested in the previous chapter, this research presents evidence that support the legitimacy of youths' reports of feeling "developmentally delayed", This is likely connected to factors such as a lack of access to dating partners, familial constraints, and personal barriers relating to identity. It is plausible these constraints disrupt typical patterns of attachment redistribution. Some of the patterns that emerged from youth narratives illuminate fractures in this process: barriers between LGBTQ-youth and their non-LGBTQ friends, unstable family relationships, and troubles that arise in romantic relationships due to differences in expectations and experience, as well as power and control. Consequently, youths' ability to recognize and successfully navigate relationship conflicts, violence and abuse is compromised.

The increased "need and desire" for a partner frequently discussed by participants was often attributed to a real or perceived lack of options. However, it is plausible that an LGBTQ-partner may serve multiple functions that may not be met by family, LGBTQ or non-LGBTQ
friends (or in the absence of LGBTQ-friends/community). The "need and desire" for a relationship likely reflects deeper needs for intimacy, stability, trust, understanding, and affirmation; some queer youth may not have families, friends, or other places to satisfy these needs. Thus, the comfort and protection that seems to be an underlying dynamic of the "need and desire" theme may not only be the result of internalizing romanticized views of relationships; it may be a way to address unmet needs. Regardless of youths' reported motivations for finding and staying in a romantic relationship, the perceived benefits of having a partner appear to overshadow the irreconcilability of the reality that having a partner who hurts you is a definite reality.

The assessment that for heterosexual adolescents, “friends are involved in, influence, and can be affected by the lives of dating couples” (Adelman and Hea Kil 2007:1297) also holds true for queer youth. However, the specific issues and factors youth negotiate around friends diverge in significant ways from cisgender heterosexual youth. Given the degree to which stigma impacts youth's reported comfort talking with friends, as well as friends' hesitance to get involved in the dating relationships of friends, and the perception voiced by some participants that friends can be dangerous or even abusive raises serious questions about the extent to which LGBTQ youth can rely on friends for social support. This is important in light of study results that also point to friends as the primary source of support and relationship advice.

There is evidence that many LGBTQ adolescents face an increased risk of marginalization and isolation, which could function to exacerbate dating violence (Kosciw et al. 2008). At the same time, some queer youths may benefit from protective factors such as informal
peer networks and involvement with LGBTQ school or community groups. Research suggests that sexual-minority students who attend schools with gay-straight alliances experience positive benefits due to increased levels of social support (Walls, Kane, and Wisneski 2009). In addition to providing a space where youth can feel supported, queer-specific organizations may create space for dialogue around LGBTQ adolescent relationships and possibly strengthen youths’ ability to recognize and address unhealthy or abusive relationship dynamics, as evidenced in data collected from UNITE participants. The possibility of unique protective factors sustained by community ties should not be overlooked.

_Theorizing queer adolescent dating violence._ In sum, these findings provide support for a theoretical model for queer relationship violence that not only accounts for LGBTQ-status, but developmental issues in adolescence. Emergent themes indicate there are factors relating to adolescent development and the trajectory of romantic relationships, as well as issues around identity, that intersect with minority stress relating to sexuality and/or gender. Therefore, theoretical models seeking to explain queer adolescent dating violence and abuse must recognize how and to what extent queer youth positionalities intersect with one another; and connect the power dynamics institutionalized in society with youth’s individual and interpersonal experiences.

VI. CONCLUSION
Queer youth perceptions of relationship violence, the language used to talk about it, and negotiations of abuse in their own relationships and those of close friends, are the primary focus of this chapter. In contrast to the almost unequivocal shared perception that abuse does occur in queer adolescent relationships, many youth subsequently noted that they had never been in an abusive or violent relationship, neither had their friends, nor had they ever heard of one. This was a common assertion, despite a consistent pattern whereby many of the same youth provided a direct or indirect example of queer relationship violence or abuse. This pattern speaks to the power that language and heteronormative social ideologies have on queer youth's (in)ability to conceptualize queer violence and abuse. There is a clear contradiction in youth narratives that illustrates a disjuncture between beliefs in the idea of violence in queer relationships versus their ability or willingness to identity, characterize, or label it in that manner.

Social dynamics and inequalities create a context where queer adolescents' ability to conceptualize dating violence is undermined by a lack of clear definitional dialogues for queer IPV. This results in uncertainty and ambiguity in youth's talk about relationship conflicts and violence. Results offer insight into issues specific to the experiences of queer youth who are survivors of violence, and the nature of challenges identified by people who are friends of survivors. In particular, the role of friends as sources of support was complicated by worries about being able to trust friends, stigma, and shame; as well as friends' reluctance to intervene for a variety of reasons that relate back to either LGBTQ-status, feelings of inefficacy, not knowing what to do, and worries about alienating their friend.
Results point to the intersection of sexuality, gender, age, and power in the lives and experiences of LGBTQ youth, particularly in the context of violence and abuse in romantic relationships. It is clear that both sexual and gender minority stress, as well as developmental dynamics specific to adolescence, are interrelated. Thus, theories that seek to explain queer adolescent dating violence must account for the way that systemic inequalities, sexual and gender minority stressors, and developmental issues intersect to shape relationship experiences, as well as queer youth perceptions and negotiations of dating conflicts, violence and abuse.

Ultimately, findings on LGBTQ adolescent perceptions and negotiations of dating conflicts and violence provide insight into the ways cultural and community context and factors relating to adolescent development impact a population located at the intersection of sexual/gender minority status and adolescence. While these findings are specific to queer adolescents by design, it is important to recognize that these findings must be placed within larger discourses of IPV. The results do not suggest that being queer and an adolescent are the main or only reasons these particular findings emerged from youth narratives. It would be remiss to assume that queer youth in particular are prone to violent behavior in relationships, for example. Instead, the qualitative results presented here are intended to engage with, contribute to, and inform larger dialogues of IPV from which they have been excluded. The final chapter presents the broader theoretical implications of the findings presented in this dissertation. It emphasizes the main argument centralized in this chapter, which is the necessity of utilizing an integrative theoretical approach in health and violence research with LGBTQ adolescents. The
Conclusion also offers policy and practice suggestions, dually informed by the main findings and what youth participants themselves directly said they need in order to have healthy relationships.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study is to centralize LGBTQ adolescent voices in an academic conversation about queer teen dating violence. Findings overwhelmingly confirm the necessity of recognizing queer adolescent dating abuse as a serious issue, and expands discourse in the fields of sociology, feminist studies, and health. Examining how queer adolescents conceptualize and negotiate relationship conflicts and abuse, this cross-disciplinary study addresses serious gaps in IPV literature, and engages with scholarship on adolescent romantic relationships and the health of LGBTQ youth populations. Multiple qualitative methods were used to collect interview, focus group, and ethnographic data from samples of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified adolescents. A grounded, feminist methodological approach led to the identification of three distinct, yet interrelated, sets of findings. Expanding the scope of the study, emergent themes speak to the broader context of LGBTQ adolescence (chapter four), perceptions of romantic relationships and dating culture (chapter five), and findings specific to dating violence and abuse (chapter six).

This chapter provides a synthesis of the key theoretical contributions of each chapter. Most broadly, results call for a theoretical approach that recognizes the intersection of identity and oppression (made especially evident through the ubiquity of minority stress) with developmental issues central to adolescence. This chapter also discusses the overall significance
of these findings for policy, practice, and issues of social justice for LGBTQ youth. Policy and practice recommendations are informed by study results and the direct suggestions made by youth participants. This chapter concludes with a discussion of study limitations and suggestions for future research on queer teen dating violence; an emerging area critical to the health, safety and general well-being of LGBTQ youth.

I. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

Emergent themes from the data highlight how structural and cultural dynamics interact with individual and community experiences to shape queer youth perceptions and negotiations of dating conflicts and violence. Consequently, the organization of the results presented in this dissertation speak to the way LGBTQ adolescent experiences with institutionalized inequalities impact intimate and romantic relationships. Drawing on insights from feminist intersectionality and social ecological approaches, as well as theories of minority stress and adolescent development; findings presented in chapter four offer the context for results focusing on queer relationships and relationship violence. Chapter five examines queer youth's perceptions of and experiences with queer dating culture, and identifies factors and dynamics that impact relationship functioning. Chapter five presents a clear picture of the intersecting nature of age and LGBTQ-identities in the context of queer adolescent romantic relationships and culture. Emphasizing the way structural issues impact personal experiences, this chapter is in dialogue with theories of adolescent development and the developmental tasks associated with romantic
relationships and identity development. Understanding developmental issues relating to adolescence and early adulthood, particularly as they intersect with minority stress, creates a context for findings about dating violence and abuse. Chapter six presents analysis of data on queer adolescent perceptions and negotiations of relationship conflict and violence, both in terms of their own relationships and the relationships of friends. Using a similarly integrative approach, results indicate the salience of theories of intersectionality and institutionalized inequalities, sexual and gender minority stress and adolescent development in attempts to understand issues that relate to queer adolescent intimate partner violence.

*Contextualizing and Conceptualizing Queer Relationship Violence*

Ursay, a 20-year-old, biracial, cisgender lesbian, states she does not know what even "counts" as sex with another woman. She expresses reluctance to discuss sex with anyone, let alone a potential partner. While perhaps more direct than other participants about how ambiguity surrounding queer relationships impacts her understanding of intimate relationships, Ursay's assertion is representative of broader themes present in many youth narratives. She concludes with the suggestion that in order to "find out" what sex is like, you probably just have to be in the moment, and realize “oh, it worked out”. Her thought process reflects a common pattern whereby entry into the "queer dating world" is predicated on a lack of social scripts for queer dating and intimacy, and informed by romanticized, heteronormative notions of relationships. Dating and sexual inexperience is clearly a factor; as are issues that can be traced to developmental tasks typically achieved through engagement in romantic relationships (e.g. communication skills and intimacy).
Further, Ursay's assumption that things will "work out" contrasts with the reality that things do not always go smoothly, as illustrated in many youth narratives. This is perhaps especially clear in Seth's description of the dating-turned-sexual situation he described as the “night you didn’t want to happen," which came across as a case of date-rape. The incongruence between youths' ideas about queer dating relationships and violence (i.e. it definitely happens) and the way they interpret and talk about violent or abusive incidents (e.g. minimizing language, belief that what "counts" is different for people of the same-sex, the idea that in certain contexts, pressure or violation is inevitable or normal, etc.), this seeming contradiction, represents a curious pattern in study results.

However, upon closer scrutiny, this pattern can be understood in the context of institutionalized inequalities and dominant cultural ideologies that condone violence. It is exacerbated by minority stress, which limits youths' ability to make unconstrained choices because of shame and stigma. The symbolic violence against LGBTQ populations resulting from institutionalized homo-bi-transphobia, combined with silence around LGBTQ relationships, may function to make relationship violence seem acceptable in a larger context that condones various forms of anti-LGBTQ violence. Despite lacking access to language and social scripts to communicate easily or clearly about violence and abuse in queer relationships, there is clear evidence it does occur, and youth often indicate concern, discomfort, or hesitance when talking about these incidents. The underlying sense conveyed that something is not right about what they are discussing, despite apparently contradictory language use or framing, ultimately supports the shared perception that dating violence and abuse is a significant issue that needs more attention.
in LGBTQ adolescent communities. Results focusing on the broader culture of LGBTQ adolescent dating and relationships, as well as the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence, provide valuable insight into these and other findings relating to IPV in queer adolescent relationships.

The aim of this study is to understand how queer adolescents perceive the issue of dating abuse in LGBTQ relationships and communities, and it is beyond scope of the data to draw specific conclusions about how LGBTQ adolescent dating violence (or queer youth's perceptions) compare to cisgender heterosexual adolescent populations. However, it is important to note that there are likely universals in both the experience and perception of IPV, sexual assault, and abuse that are completely unrelated to culture and community (e.g. the shame experienced by survivors of intimate violence and reluctance to label abuse as abusive). At the same time, some dynamics or factors (e.g. minority stress and stigma) may be especially salient to IPV among queer youth. Findings relating to queer adolescent perceptions and negotiations of intimate violence must be understood within the greater context of IPV scholarship, which recognizes that certain contextual factors and structurally-rooted inequalities make certain parts of the experience of IPV differ for minority communities. Taken together, the results of this study indicate a need for an integrative and broad-ranging approach to queer adolescent dating violence and abuse. The next section will highlight important elements of such an approach.

II. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS
This study addresses theoretical gaps in dominant sociological and feminist frameworks for intimate partner violence scholarship, which appear ill-equipped to address the experiences of queer adolescents who are battered by their partner. Due to the methodological approach prioritizing queer youth voices, the results presented in this dissertation approach the topic of queer adolescent IPV in a unique way. Findings begin by offering insight into the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescents' lives, with a macro-level focus on cultural climate and structural inequalities that result in minority stress. The next set of findings offer a more nuanced discussion of queer romantic relationships and dating culture that highlight the intersecting nature of LGBTQ-identities and age (primarily focusing on adolescent development). Finally, this dissertation concludes with findings on queer adolescent violence and abuse. While this research does not explicitly seek to explain the causes of queer teen dating violence, or present an examination of what teen dating violence looks like in this population, it does offer results that provide the contextual groundwork needed for future research on queer adolescents dating violence.

*Queer Adolescence, Romantic Relationships, and Relationship Violence*

A comprehensive theoretical approach is needed to address the multi-level processes and dynamics that impact queer adolescents, their relationships, and their conceptualizations of abuse. Findings point to the utility of intersectionality, the interplay of cultural ideologies and individual experiences, sexual and gender minority stress, and adolescent development, for explaining themes and patterns in the data. While these elements are broadly applicable for
scholarship on health and violence in this particular population, the discussion below will exemplify their direct utility in addressing the questions raised in this research.

Intersectionality. Intersectional frameworks foreground interlocking systems of domination in analyses of intimate partner violence. Institutionalized heterosexism, homo/bi/transphobia, and ageism intersect in the lives of queer adolescents. Their personal experiences with dating relationships, as well as relationship violence and abuse, occur in a broader social context of institutionalized oppression. Emergent trends in data illustrate how queer adolescent experiences are subject to the multidimensional effects of heterosexism, heteronormativity and homo/bi/transphobia. They are aware of institutionalized inequalities and violence, and adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, fear of holding hands in public and recognition of the reality that law enforcement, domestic violence advocates, teachers, parents or even friends may not know what to do (at best) or may perpetrate further violence (at worst) point to the way structural oppressions are experienced personally by youth.

Cultural ideologies, community, and individual experiences. Some sociologists view culture and cultural ideologies as social institutions. However, in the context of LGBTQ research, emphasizing the specific role of communities and cultural ideologies is crucial, and is included here as a separate category. Both dominant cultural ideologies that perpetuate social inequalities, as well as community-level cultural ideologies and norms, clearly have multidimensional effects on the risk and resilience of queer youth populations. Findings point to the positive impact and need for social and community-level support around queer-identities. They also illustrate the damaging nature of dominant ideologies about queer relationships that
promote stereotypical imagery, as well as romanticized notions of (cisgender/heterosexual) romantic relationships that youth struggle to achieve in the context of their real (non-heterosexual/transgender) relationships. The impact of a lack of social scripts for queer relationships and relationship violence is further compounded by limited experiences engaging in queer dating culture and often limited dating experience as a whole. Most illustrative of this dynamic is the disjuncture apparent in youth narratives around relationship expectations versus experiences. One form this take is evidenced in youth's expectations of what queer romantic relationships will be like. Unrealistic relationship expectations are (often retrospectively) identified as idealized by some youth, others still view the "perfect" relationship as a possibility. When these expectations are not met, youth struggle to figure out what the best course of action is, with many indicating that the solution may be to settle for a less than ideal (or in some cases, episodically violent or chronically abusive) relationship. These choices result from a combination of inexperience, a lack of knowledge, and fears of not finding another partner.

Another example is explained in depth in the previous chapter, where ideologies about intimate partner violence indicate to youth that it's probable queer relationship violence occurs, yet many report never having been witness to it, while in the same conversation reporting examples of violence or abuse that are not labeled or recognized as violence. These examples point to the importance of recognizing the way individual-level experiences, beliefs, and values are influenced by dominant cultural ideologies as well as notions and interpretations of queer community-norms and practices. Thus, both structural inequalities relating to LGBTQ-status (in their many forms) as well as cultural ideologies and community-dynamics are necessary for
understanding youth's perceptions and negotiations of health issues such as intimate partner abuse and rape. Further, both create the landscape of adverse social conditions from which sexual and gender minority stress emerge.

Sexual and gender minority stress. Results indicate both the salience of theories of minority stress in health and violence research with LGBTQ youth, as well as the need to expand frameworks to account for transgender populations and the presence of gender-related stress experienced by some LGB individuals. Therefore, findings in chapter four call for an expanded theory I refer to as sexual and gender minority stress (SGMS). This framework includes recognition of (trans)gender-related stress. It also draws from the data to identify new ways of identifying identity-related stress: pride in one's identity, and the related desire (and stress) of asserting one's LGBTQ identity and countering the assumption of heterosexuality. This can be used in conjunction with typical operationalization of this concept as stigma-related, accounted for by "identity concealment" measures. Finally, this expansion calls for the incorporation of a new analytic category: heteronormativity, to be used in addition to homo/bi/transphobia.

In relation to queer adolescent dating violence, findings reveal a link between institutionalized or symbolic violence and expectations and negotiations of violence in romantic relationships. The role of stigma and shame, as well as stress relating to constrained choices due the real or perceived effects of being LGBTQ and interacting with non-queer people and cultures (or, being transgender and interacting with "LGBTQ communities") has significant and varied effects on the form and functioning romantic relationships. Internalizing the negative cultural ideologies discussed previously proves significant in youth's decisions around what levels of
conflict and/or violence may be acceptable; low self-esteem was commonly linked to participants' explanations of risky sexual behavior or substance use. Sexual and gender minority stress thus results from the structural and cultural inequalities related to being LGBTQ-identified (or in non-cisgender/non-heterosexual relationships) in our society. SGMS also intersects with age in the lives of youth participants. In addition to other key elements of the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence, which include family acceptance/rejection and isolation, adolescent development proved to be a significant dynamic.

*Adolescent development.* Given the significance of developmental tasks central to adolescence, research on queer adolescent dating violence must recognize the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescent dating relationships, the effects of social inequalities on individuals and relationships, and developmental issues (some of which may be impacted by LGBTQ-identities). While many of the general processes of individual and social development may be similar for heterosexual and queer youth, this study cannot speak to whether or not this is the case; it is an area in need to more targeted research. However, findings indicate LGBTQ youth experiences are impacted by heterosexism and homo/bi/transphobia, including evidence of their effect on interpersonal relationships with, friends, families and romantic partners.

One of the strongest indicators of the need to recognize how adolescent development relates to queer romantic relationships was that some youth directly link the two; explaining a feeling or perception of being developmentally delayed in terms of romantic relationship experience and skills due to being LGBTQ in a predominantly cisgender/heterosexual society. Evidence of the impact of developmental factors in queer relationships themselves took many
forms. One of the most salient in terms of the focus of this study relates to inequitable power relationships that resulted from differences in age and/or relationship/sexual experience. The implications of this for IPV may seem clear: inequitable power dynamics can be exploited. Especially concerning was the emergence of themes that suggest youth perceived this to occur. Some youth stated belief that people intentionally exploit these and other inequitable power dynamics.

Given a broader social context in which LGBTQ populations are generally positioned as "other", the desire to exert power in the more private realm of intimate relationships is not unlikely. The fact that youth generally report their first engagement in relationships occurs later in adolescence than their cisgender, heterosexual peers raises serious questions about the implications of youth's recognition that some people intentionally use power to control or manipulate their partner to their own benefit. This seems to depart from dominant heterosexual adolescent discourses of dating violence and abuse, where perceptions generally appear to centralize issues such as jealousy, gender, etc.; not necessarily the need to gain power denied to them by society\(^1\). More maturity as individuals and a greater awareness of the social dynamics around LGBTQ identities/social location, may make it easier for LGBTQ adolescents and young adults to recognize the possibility of someone with more relative power using their power to gain control over a partner who has less experience or who is younger (or who may have more to lose if their relationship is revealed prematurely). Combined with a lack of social scripts, the need

\(^1\) The focus here on LGBTQ adolescents is not intended to suggest adolescents who are LGBTQ (because they are LGBTQ) may be the only subpopulation of adolescents who may respond to the effects of being denied structural power by exerting power and control in relationships. Other adolescents who occupy one or more minority positions (in relation to race/ethnicity, class, etc.) may assert power over their partner in an attempt to combat powerlessness resulting from systemic oppression.
and desire to achieve the developmentally significant experience of a romantic relationship, and a culture where LGBTQ relationships are often marked by some degree of secrecy; recognizing that a social context where power is central, and decisions around using power over someone (versus seeking individual empowerment) is important.

*An Integrative Framework for LGBTQ Health and Violence Research*

Exploring the meaning of queer adolescent beliefs that LGBTQ adolescent relationships are perceived as less serious than adult, cisgender/heterosexual relationships, demonstrates the interplay of these four factors. Some participants volunteered that romantic relationships are generally viewed as less serious than adult relationships, a cultural ideology that delegitimizes youth relationships as well as the violence and abuse that sometimes occurs within them. A related, compounding factor is that adolescents have less structural support compared to adults. The lack of structural support for healthy relationships is more pronounced among LGBTQ adolescents, whose relationships are further under-acknowledged and under-accounted for due to heterosexist ideologies and homo/bi/transphobia. Developmental factors relating to adolescence, and the sometimes tenuous nature of family and peer relationships that are central to this developmental stage, intersect with the cultural ideologies and structural inequalities highlighted above. The result is a complex interplay of the interpersonal and individual-level effects of sexual and gender minority stress, and dynamics related to queer adolescent development. Further, these effects and dynamics related to SGMS and queer adolescent development are both rooted in, and exacerbate, structural inequalities and delegitimizing and marginalizing cultural ideologies. The end result is that queer adolescents view of their own relationships is fractured
by cultural ideologies, and supported by structural dynamics, that convey the message that their relationships are in fact less legitimate and less worthy. This makes it possible for the violence and abuse that occurs within them to be overlooked or explained away, or even expected or accepted. In sum, foundational elements for theories that seek to explain health and violence in LGBTQ adolescent populations must account for:

- The complex intersection of dynamics relating to age, sexuality and gender
- The significance of social context, particularly the interplay of cultural ideologies, community culture, and the individual experiences of LGBTQ youth
- Sexual and gender minority stress
- Dynamics specific to developmental status

III. QUEER YOUTH TALK ABOUT ADDRESSING RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Feminist scholarship recognizes the political nature of research. Feminist research objectives include rigorous engagement with scholarly debates, recognition of the power dynamics inherent in all stages of the research process, and a commitment to social justice. This study engages theoretical issues through analysis of data collected using feminist methodologies. This methodological approach prioritizes direct engagement with queer youth and their communities. It is intentional about validating the thoughts and experiences queer youth, and integrating their perspectives into discourses from which they have previously been excluded. This approach to research and its implementation in this particular study sought to create a space for youth to explore and critically reflect on dating culture and relationships, and provide an opportunity to offer thoughts and suggestions about what changes or support LGBTQ youth and communities
may benefit from; youth were asked about what they felt would support healthier relationships in their communities. Thus, presenting youth-driven recommendations is important to include in this concluding chapter. The list below represents a compilation of direct suggestions from youth participants. The lack of consistent patterns and themes informed my decision to include the compilation here, as opposed to presenting them alongside empirical results. However, despite a lack of consensus on what would support healthier queer relationships, the value of insights derived from first-hand experience cannot be understated. These are their suggestions:

- **Raise awareness so youth would be able to recognize the possibility of abuse in queer relationships.** Media was cited as one possible way to promote awareness of LGBTQ relationship abuse. A poster on public transportation advertising services was another; and example of an effective campaign was said to contain an image of a same-sex couple in love that had text suggesting there also may be violence toward one another.

- **Address public perceptions and dispel stereotypes.** This was mentioned in references to dominant culture, as well as on interpersonal levels (including within LGBTQ communities).

- **Increase access to informal and formal education about healthy relationships.** This would address problems such as knowing about available resources and feeling comfortable accessing them. Formal education in school settings about LGBTQ-specific relationships was one of the more common suggestions. Community-based education was also cited as an important avenue to increase access to information. Informal education about healthy queer relationships (in popular magazines, for example) or informal meetings somewhere, were others.

- **Education that focuses on correcting misperceptions about the causes and types of violence.**

- **Address uncertainty around support-related issues. Educate youth how to help their peers.** Youth report being uncertain about what to say, what counts as serious enough to get help, who to go to, whether their actions/responses actually help as opposed to hurt.
• **Focus on increasing queer youth's self-esteem/self-respect/maturity.** This was specifically discussed in relation to the perception that there are certain situations where there are (sexual) expectations; and young, inexperienced youth may not feel equipped to say no or prevent the sexual experience from happening. It was also mentioned that increasing self-esteem would help youth avoid blaming themselves for their partner's use of violence.

• **Promote LGBTQ-specific support networks to mitigate the damage of homo/bi/transphobia.** Specifically related to institutionalized violence (such as police harassment) as well as family rejection.

• **Create "safe spaces" for youth.** These would provide general social support and create an environment where youth feel like they are "the majority" and feel comfortable being who they are. These may also offer ways to meet other queer adolescents, outside of places where alcohol and a "hook-up" mentality are central.

• **Increase access (in a geographic sense) to [clearly queer-friendly] resources and support.**

• **Make sure therapists and intimate partner providers are not biased.** Either in terms of stereotyping LGBTQ communities; or by conveying that just because they are a lesbian, it does not mean they cannot help a gay man.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The policy and practice implications presented here are reflective of study results and informed by the interpretations and conclusions of the participants presented above. Implications and suggestions range from macro-level structural changes, to individual-level needs that can be supported through community and interpersonal relationships.
Structural Inequalities and Social Change

Results indicate the salience of institutionalized oppression in the perceptions, assessments, and behavior of youth in dating and intimate relationships. Sexual and gender minority stress is a result of institutionalized oppression; manifesting through direct exposure to prejudice of violence, shame and stigma, and the internalization of heteronormativity and homo/bi/transphobia. Systemic change is needed to create a context where queer youth can make unconstrained choices in their relationships. Further, institutional dynamics pertaining to cultural ideologies, and LGBTQ community and cultural norms, must reflect a shift in emphasis on risk and marginalization in favor of inclusion and affirmation. This will allow LGBTQ youth to feel more empowered in their identities, lives and intimate relationships.

Cultural Ideologies and a "Language" for LGBTQ IPV

Queer adolescents are socialized into a dominant culture where heterosexual relationships between cisgender partners function as the primary model for intimate relationships. This is a contributing factor in queer youth's tendency to position relationship violence and abuse as a significant community issue, while commonly failing to see or conceptualize violence, abuse, sexual assault and rape in their examples of relationship "issues" or "conflicts". Talking about and naming LGBTQ relationship violence, abuse and intimate-partner rape are crucial to bridging this disconnect. Naming, raising awareness, and educating about these topics legitimizes the experience and reality of relationship violence and abuse in queer communities. Framing it as a serious social and health problem in queer adolescent communities not only reflects, but supports, queer youths' recognition of problematic behavior. Recognition,
awareness, and education disrupts heteronormative social ideologies that make it difficult for queer youth (and society at large) to access and feel confident using the language that most directly represents the existence and experience of relationship violence and sexual abuse.

Creating a public discourse that clearly positions queer IPV as a social and public health issue also contributes to a climate more conducive to open discussions about LGBTQ relationships. Supporting youth's ability to conceptualize relationship abuse as abusive, (or at least increasing the possibility of being exposed to IPV discourses that allow them to feel confident it is significant problem worthy of attention) creates the infrastructure needed for queer youth to seek and utilize available systems of intervention and support. Public recognition is also a precursor for the institutional changes needed to create such support systems, and make culturally-competent services available and accessible to LGBTQ youth.

Access to Information and Resources

In addition to raising awareness of queer adolescent relationship violence and positioning it as a social problem and public health issue, a broad policy and program objective must be to increase access to information and resources. Recognizing the influence of sexual and gender minority stress, as well as issues relating to age (and possible status as a legal minor) are crucial considerations. Medically accurate and culturally responsive information about sexuality, queer intimate relationships, and what healthy relationships look like must be made available to LGBTQ youth. Given that the internet is (in general) a widely-available resource, which also has the potential to reach LGBTQ youth who do not otherwise have access to queer communities or resources, this information should be easily accessible via the internet. However, issues
around language and the massive amount of misinformation make it imperative that outreach efforts include a variety of approaches to the dissemination of information.

**Public Policy Initiatives**

*Health education in school settings.* Age-appropriate health education that is LGBTQ-inclusive should be mandated in school settings. This would maximize exposure to accurate information about crucial health and wellness issues. It would also raise awareness of issues such as queer dating violence, and provide all youth with basic tools to validate and support friends who may be in an unsafe relationship situation.

*Institutionalizing LGBTQ-related social support.* Another policy initiative that would likely prove beneficial is to increase social-support for LGBTQ youth. It would be best if this were to happen in both in school and community-based settings. Research on the value of sexuality-related social support, plus study results that speak to the depth and breadth of the needs UNITE addressed for LGBTQ youth participants, point to the value of institutionalizing LGBTQ-related social support. An added benefit would be the potential to connect youth with other services and programs that may be beneficial to them or their families.

**Direct Service Organizations and Service Provision**

*Organizational practices.* Intimate partner violence and other direct-service organizations must institutionalize LGBTQ-affirmative practices. Awareness of LGBTQ-specific needs (e.g. assessment tools for same-sex IPV) and the implementation of practices that do not assume sexuality or the gender of one's partner upon first contact, are necessary to ensure LGBTQ adolescents receive effective services. In addition, individuals who provide direct services must
be trained to provide services that are appropriate for LGBTQ youth. This includes training that dispels stereotypes about LGBTQ intimate partner violence, offers comprehensive information about best-practices for working with transgender survivors, and education about issues that maybe especially salient for LGBTQ youth, (or subpopulations of LGBTQ youth, such as youth of color, immigrants, legal minors, etc.). It is critical for the first-contact youth have with support organizations to be affirmative (achieved through interactions with knowledgeable staff using affirmative language) as queer youth in this study reported a range of alienating experiences with institutions that functioned to deter them from seeking formalized sources of support.

Provision of health and wellness services in general must also be affirmative of LGBTQ-specific needs and identities, as youth are likely to withhold information and questions relating to queer relationships, sexuality, and identity if proactive efforts are not made to convey it is safe to disclose identity-related information. This requires more than having LGBTQ-affirmative brochures and rainbow stickers on doors. For the provision of mental health and general health services, it is necessary for intake forms to collect information (in a way that maintains confidentiality) to facilitates the placement of youth with mental health counselors, therapists, and doctors who have the necessary training and skills to effectively work with LGBTQ-clients. It may seem obvious, but being "accepting" of LGBTQ-individuals does not prepare one to work intensively with LGBTQ-clients in mental health or medical settings. Getting the sense that someone they were seeking help from was not well-equipped to handle the situation due to awkward use of language or subtle indications of misunderstandings or stereotyping, was a
recurring theme in youth narratives; perhaps especially true for transgender youth. All providers must be equipped to make appropriate referrals for a range of LGBTQ- and non-LGBTQ specific health and wellness needs of queer adolescents.

LGBTQ organizations. LGBTQ-serving organizations must be prepared to engage with youth who may need facilitated referrals. Formalized protocols for recognizing and responding to the needs of LGBTQ adolescents is important. Organizations should have a list of verified services in their specific geographic region. Referrals should only be made if the referring organization has proof they have and can provide adequate services to LGBTQ youth; in this regard, it may be useful for LGBTQ-serving organizations to keep track of the experiences of youth who have sought services. When making referrals, organizations and their staff should be aware of potential barriers to accessibility (due to economic constraints, limited access to transportation, etc.).

Ethnographic data from this study overwhelmingly indicated that even if the main purpose of an LGBTQ-youth focused organization is not to provide or locate social services, in the absence of (or lack of awareness of) other sources of support, LGBTQ youth will seek support where they feel most accepted, understood, and comfortable. Individuals who engage directly with youth should be trained in basic risk- and safety-assessment skills, and have resources to make appropriate referrals. Implementing policies, procedures, and support for individuals or organizations to following up with and support youth in connecting with these services would be beneficial. Having enough knowledge to answer basic questions about concerns relating to confidentiality, expressing confidence youth would not be exposed to further
harm due to heterosexism or homo/bi/transphobia, and being able to provide a sense of what youth may expect to happen should they initiate contact, would all serve to increase youths comfort making contact with an unfamiliar organization.

Also, LGBTQ-serving organizations need to be aware of and responsive to the specific needs of transgender youth and LGBTQ youth of color. Organizational cultures that position LG (and B) participants above transgender participants, as well as those that elevate LGBTQ-identities above racial/ethnic identities or other culturally-specific identities, risk perpetuating the same inequalities and violence in dominant culture that causes harm to LGBTQ youth. Programming, resources, language use, and awareness of cultural climate-related issues are all areas that must be examined for possible bias or marginalization.

*Outreach efforts, access, and safety*. Not only must youth must be made aware of supportive services available to them, but efforts must be made to increase access and create an environment where youth feel safe seeking services. This not only requires LGBTQ-affirmative organizations and programs in geographically diverse areas, but effective outreach strategies that make it clear to LGBTQ-youth that it is safe and appropriate for them to seek support. In relation to intimate partner violence, it should be clear that youth are encouraged to seek support even if they feel it is unclear whether the situation they are concerned about "counts" as violence, abuse, or rape. Due to economic and transportation barriers, supportive services must be widely-available. Creative ways to provide access to services may be necessary, especially in areas where LGBTQ-adolescent populations seem non-existent or invisible, or where there are not enough people to justify funding a full-scale program. Some ideas include drop-in programs
with rotating locations and coalitions between IPV organizations and programs serving general youth populations (as well as LGBTQ youth serving organizations).

Targeted outreach efforts must be made to LGBTQ youth populations. This requires specific attention, as LGBTQ youth may be especially reluctant to seek services for fear of revictimization due to their identity, concerns around confidentiality, or the assumption that people may just not understand their situation. Cultural ideologies that support social silence around queer-IPV also function to make youth even less likely to recognize the fit and benefit of supportive services around healthy relationships and IPV. Population-based data and the prevalence of sexual and gender minority stress in LGBTQ populations support the recommendation that any supportive service (mental health, testing for sexually transmitted infections/diseases, abuse and sexual violence, etc.) may be in a strong position to conductive passive outreach individuals who need a range of supportive services. Therefore, organizations, programs and facilities that house LGBTQ-affirmative or inclusive services are well-positioned to reach LGBTQ-populations simply making cards or brochures for LGBTQ-specific services available to people passing through.

**Direct Interactions with Queer Youth**

For queer youth, the shame and stigma of being in a violent relationship, as well as inexperience dating, and possible fear of increasing stigma already surrounding LGBTQ relationships/identities, appear to make the decision to seek help especially hard. While it is likely specific outreach to youth themselves and an increase in awareness of queer dating violence may be effective, more broad education may be to provide support for healthy
relationship boundaries and disrupt tendencies to believe that certain behaviors that do not feel okay are "okay" in queer relationships. Many queer youth need to have their "sense" that something might be wrong legitimized, given the lack of social scripts for queer relationship and violence.

Some youth reported feeling unable to talk to their friends (due to fear or a lack of language). Thus, addressing issues pertaining to developmental tasks such as emotional control, communication skills, and body-boundaries may be of use. Legitimizing youth's right to determine how and what they feel comfortable with sexually would address dating abuse and sexual violence indirectly. For transgender youth in particular, emphasizing their right to bodily integrity and to assert their needs through open communication with a partner (and providing support and education around how to do so, and how to respond if they encounter a potentially unsafe situation) would be especially helpful. Teaching about and modeling emotional and other boundaries would equip youth with the tools they need to recognize and have the skills (should they choose to resist) advances made by more experienced partners, or partners who attempt to manipulate or exert pressure.

Individuals who identify with LGBTQ/queer communities can support healthy development and relationships among queer youth by modeling healthy relationship boundaries in their own relationships and through interactions with queer youth. Recognizing that it is okay to have personal limits and slow down information sharing, or pointing out in a non-confrontational manner that certain displays of physical affection may not be appropriate in certain situations, could serve as educational experiences that youth may be able to model in
their own relationships. Further, making use of opportunities to model healthy and situational-appropriate relationship behavior may be something to consider, given the important attributed to lacking relationships role models. For example, if chaperoning a queer-youth event with your partner, it may seem best (more professional, less risky, etc.) to conceal the nature of your relationship. However, if appropriate, introducing your partner as your partner; and modeling respectful, communicative, and professional behavior may help to normalize queer relationships and provide more realistic models for queer youth. This may combat or supplement more detrimental models that embody stereotypical, over-sexualized, or otherwise problematic images of same-sex or queer relationships.

In conclusion. This section integrates insights from research findings, ideas supplied directly by youth participants and existing scholarship to identify social changes in support of healthy intimate relationships for queer youth. Both macro and micro-level changes are needed to increase access to information and resources that would enable youth to make informed choices about their relationships and how to address relationship issues.

Most broadly, structural change combatting homo/bi/transphobia is a necessary part of building a strong foundation for institutional and cultural change. Policy makers and advocates should not only prioritize legislation that legitimizes same-sex relationships (such as same-sex marriage, for example) but also school-based comprehensive health education programs that recognize and address the health needs of queer adolescents and healthy queer relationships. To effectively provide culturally competent services for queer adolescents, cultural and developmental needs must be recognized. Research, policy, and programs must also be attentive
to potential sources of resilience among LGBTQ youth (such as familial support) in addition to addressing risk or unmet needs among queer adolescents. Lastly, investigating the ways LGBTQ adolescent experiences with IPV overlap and depart from cisgender/heterosexual teen dating violence will allow policy makers to implement (and adjust or expand where necessary) evidence-based programs for healthy relationships and to combat relationship violence among all adolescents.

V. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presents an analysis of qualitative data that speaks to the perceptions and negotiations of IPV among LGBTQ adolescents, an area in critical need of additional research. The breadth and depth of data collected using multiple-qualitative methods is complimentary to quantitative, population-based data, and provides a strong foundation for future qualitative research. Population-based research can view the results of this study as source of information that may help refine quantitative measures and contextualize analysis of empirical findings from quantitative data. Specific findings on minority stress call for renewed attention to the conceptualization of LGBTQ-related minority stress, and measures used to assess stress in LGBTQ adolescent populations. Taken as a whole, results encourage researchers from across disciplines to recognize the salience of social context in the lives and relationships of LGBTQ youth. Yet, there are limitations to the findings presented in this dissertation.

Given the largely exploratory nature of this research, it is possible study results do not
fully address the complexity of LGBTQ adolescence, and their views and negotiations of violence and abuse in relationships. Limitations posed by the sampling frame (discussed in greater detail in chapter two), issues around inconsistent language use, and a lack of established interpretive frameworks for violence research with LGBTQ youth pose the most significant limitations. Challenges relating to data collection (particularly achieving the desired sample and number of focus groups, also discussed in detail in chapter two) are important to mention here.

Specific findings call for investigation into factors that may possibly correlate with queer adolescent IPV (e.g. social support provided by friends and/or family) and that also may be relevant to other health and wellness issues. Results specific to queer adolescent relationships (e.g. the perception they are faster, more intense, or more serious) merit further examination, as do questions raised about queer adolescent development as it relates to identity and romantic relationships. Findings from this study that speak to the role of family and friends in queer adolescent romantic relationships highlight an area in need to additional research. Topics relating to the mental and physical effects of minority stress, the relationship between queer adolescent relationships and development, and queer adolescent development as it relates to dating violence and abuse, are also potential areas of fruitful inquiry for researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

The study sample is quite broad in scope. As previously discussed, there are benefits and limitations that result from this. Subcultural differences among queer young people highlight the need for more targeted research on the queer dating and relationship experiences of LGBTQ populations, especially transgender youth, who are most visibly absent from research across the
disciplines. In this study, transgender and genderqueer youth are not as well represented as other subgroups under the LGBTQ umbrella. Study results highlight the necessity of recognizing intersectionality; and while this research does illustrate intersections between sexuality, gender and age, future research and theory must explore how race, class and other cultural dynamics mediate the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents. Research is also needed with populations in rural areas, with adolescents who are not involved in queer networks, and with adolescents who may engage in same-sex romantic or sexual relationships but who do not identify as LGBTQ. Future research should take care not to exclude the voices and experiences of transgender youth or LGBTQ youth of color. More empirical research with queer youth communities is needed for theories that reflect issues pertinent to all LGBTQ-youth; not just LGBTQ adolescents who are most visible due to their social location. More research is needed to in order to obtain a full picture of the complexity of the lives of sexual minorities and transgender youth in the United States.

The feminist intersectional framework employed in this study holds that identities and oppressions are intersecting, and one cannot separate the experience of being LGBTQ from the experience of being an adolescent. Thus, results do not lend themselves to a comprehensive analysis of the ways LGBTQ adolescent dating abuse compares or contrasts with IPV in other populations. However, recognizing the findings presented on LGBTQ adolescent dating violence and abuse are necessarily impacted by a shared dominant culture, and reflect interpersonal and individual dynamics that may be common among survivors/perpetrators regardless of social location, is a critical. Therefore, while these findings specifically speak to
the experience and perceptions of LGBTQ adolescents, they cannot be assumed to be solely related to LGBTQ/adolescent status. There are likely commonalities and differences; issues and factors that vary in importance and effect, based on identity and social location. Future research may attempt to discern universal elements of IPV versus dynamics and factors that may be unique in nature and/or effect in LGBTQ youth populations.

In a similar vein, future research with LGBTQ adolescent populations and/or on same-sex adolescent romantic or otherwise intimate relationships may engage more directly with queer youth who have experienced relationship violence, abuse, and/or rape. This study explicitly sought information about youth's perceptions, and while participants often offered examples from their lives of the lives of friends, it did not directly ask solicit information about experiential knowledge and thus puts limitations on the ability to use these results to create or expand on IPV theories as they relate to queer adolescents.

VI. CONCLUSION

Dominant ideologies of intimate partner violence (IPV) contribute to misperceptions about violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) relationships. Further, specifically gendered ways of conceptualizing intimate partner violence effectively create a chasm that separates IPV from LGBTQ populations in the public imagination. This has troubling and far-reaching effects: IPV is a social and public health issue impacting individuals, communities, and (like any form of violence) has ramifications for society at large. Failing to
recognize that relationship violence in LGBTQ adolescent communities is just as prevalent and detrimental as intimate partner violence in any other community preempts the possibility of intervention and leaves LGBTQ adolescent communities especially vulnerable.

The first set of results presented in this dissertation examines the social landscape of LGBTQ adolescence and discusses the salience of sexual minority stress, concluding that minority stress frameworks for LGBTQ adolescent research must be expanded. Components of an expanded framework: sexual and gender minority stress, are identified for the purpose of establishing a foundation for future scholarship on minority stress inclusive of transgender populations and cognizant of the impact of social change. The second set of results points to the need to understand queer adolescent perceptions of LGBTQ relationships and views and expectations of queer dating culture in order to fully understand issues relating to queer dating conflicts and violence. These findings suggest the intersecting nature of identities and oppression (and their manifestation in experiences of SGMS) as well as developmental factors related to adolescence are key factors. The third set of results specifically reports findings relating to dating conflicts and violence. LGBTQ adolescent participants strongly assert that dating violence and abuse is a serious concern, and often offer examples of violent, abusive, and controlling behaviors in past relationships or relationships of friends. Yet paradoxically, the same youth often state that they have never seen or heard of an abusive queer relationship. While many of the findings presented on queer teen dating violence suggest issues and dynamics in LGBTQ adolescent relationship violence mirror those endemic to relationship violence more
broadly, it also appears that some of these factors and dynamics may be especially salient in queer adolescent relationships and community contexts.

Taken together, the broad-based implications of this study for health and violence research are clear: approaches to violence and health research must recognize the presence of the intersecting dynamics and factors relating to both LGBTQ-identities and oppression, as well as developmental issues specific to adolescence. Emergent themes discussed in this study offer insight into the issues and factors at these intersections. Queer adolescent relationship violence is an issue that requires increased attention from researchers, policy makers, community organizations, direct service providers, teachers, parents and other allies to queer youth.
Table 1. Definitions and List of Abbreviations

Adolescent: When referring to the specific sample or population that is the focus of this research, the word “adolescent” refers to youth between 14 and 22 years of age. The term "youth" is used interchangeably with “adolescent” for variation. Discussion of specific research findings will use the term employed by the researcher(s).

Bisexual ("B" in LGBTQ): Term/label describing individuals who (1) self-identify their sexuality as such, and (2) who are romantically or sexually attracted to both women and men.

Cisgender: Term/label describing individuals who generally feel their biological sex/anatomy is in alignment with the socially constructed gender category it is associated with. This is essentially the counterpart to "transgender". It is used to indicate (1) a participant's self-identification, or (2) gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual minority participants who are not also transgender or genderqueer-identified.

Heterosexism: The attitude that heterosexuality is normative, and the only valid or acceptable sexual orientation.

Homo/bi/transphobia: The irrational fear of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people; or an aversion to queer people, their lifestyle or culture, and the behaviors or actions that result from this aversion.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Domestic violence and abuse, also called intimate partner violence, is when one person purposely causes either physical or mental harm to another, including: physical abuse; psychological or emotional abuse; sexual assault; isolation; and controlling all of the victim's money, shelter, time, food, etc. Here, the term “intimate partner violence” will be used interchangeably with "relationship violence" and "relationship abuse", and will refer to all types of violence against one’s partner; those listed above, in addition to any form of coercion, threats or intimidation used to exert control. It will be used in reference to both adults and teenagers. Terms such as "domestic violence", "wife battering", and "family violence" will be used in accordance with theories and researchers classifying their work as such.

Lesbian/ Gay ("LG" in LGBTQ): Terms used to describe individuals who (1) self-identify their sexuality as such, and (2) whose primary romantic or sexual attraction is to someone of the same gender.
Teen Dating Violence (TDV)/ Relationship Violence (RV): Dating violence is when one person purposely causes physical or psychological harm to another person they are dating, including sexual assault, physical abuse, and psychological/emotional abuse. It occurs in both casual and serious relationships. This dissertation utilizes combinations of the words "teen" or "adolescent" and "dating violence", "relationship violence", or "relationship abuse", in reference to adolescent-aged individuals who are in a dating, romantic, or intimate relationship where a range of behaviors and/or intonations are used by one partner to coerce, intimidate, Humiliate or control the other; and/or when physical or sexually abusive behavior is present.

Transgender/ Gender Nonconforming/ Trans ("T" in LGBTQ): Transgender is an umbrella term that includes youth who transition (or aspire to transition) from one gender to another, and/or gender non-conforming youth whose gender identity, behaviors, appearance to not match social norms associated with their birth sex in a binary sex/gender system. This includes a range of people, including: male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM) transgender/transsexual youth, as well as youth whose gender identity (how they identify their own gender) or expression (how they express their gender identity) differ from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. The signifier "trans" will sometimes be used to reflect the range of subjectivities that comprise transgender/gender non-conforming populations.

Queer ("Q" in LGBTQ): The term “queer” encompasses people who identify as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or in any way that falls outside of the normative sex/gender system, whereby dichotomous sex designations (male/female) align with binary definitions of gender (man/woman and masculinity/femininity) and heterosexual sexuality. This term has been chosen because emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction; social identity; and intimate or sexual experiences are oftentimes not congruent. Thus, identifying with one of the aforementioned terms is at times undesirable or inappropriate. This research assumes that the meaning of gender/sexual identity for queer and questioning adolescents is fluid and contingent on social context. The acronym LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer) will sometimes be used in place of the term queer, except in instances where research findings are applicable to a specific subset of this population.

Queer Adolescent Community: Community is defined in many different ways, and the boundaries are oftentimes unclear, permeable and subject to variation according to place, time and context. For this research, “queer adolescent community” is used to refer to the sense of connection or commonality that queer adolescents have with other queer youth by virtue of their status as queer in a straight society. When used in specific reference to the population or sample of this research, “queer adolescent community at UNITE” will refer to the community of youth who attend meetings hosted by the queer youth non-profit organization where ethnographic data for this research was collected.

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Table 2. Gender and Sexual Identities of Interview and Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender Women</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender Men</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender and [Gender]Queer</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: N = 23
APPENDIX A. PSEUDONYMS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Interview Participants
- Felicia, a 23-year-old, White, cisgender lesbian
- Britt, a 17-year-old, Hispanic, cisgender lesbian
- Caleb, an 18-year-old White, bisexual cisgender man
- Drew, a 22-year-old multi-racial (White, Hispanic, Native American) male who identified as 90 percent gay and 10 percent bisexual
- Eli, a White, 18-year-old, gay male, who identifies as genderqueer
- Zane, a 16-year-old biracial (White/Native American) genderqueer pansexual, who specified that ze preferred the gender-neutral pronouns "ze" or "zir"
- Gabri, an 18-year-old, White, bisexual cisgender woman
- Ursay, a 20-year-old, biracial (African American/and West Indian) cisgender lesbian
- Jayla, an 18-year-old, Black/African American, bisexual, cisgender woman
- Kevin, a 22-year-old, gay, White, cisgender man
- Seth, a 21-year-old, White, gay, cisgender man
- Marie, a 19-year-old, White, bisexual cisgender woman
- Heyes, a gay, White, 19-year-old cisgender man [*Also a focus group participant]
- Reed, a 22-year-old, White, cisgender gay man [**Also a focus group participant]
- Nate, a 21-year-old, White, cisgender gay man
- Olivia, an 18-year-old, White, bisexual cisgender woman
- Preston, a 21-year-old, biracial (White, Portuguese, European), transgender man, who identifies his sexuality as transgender, indicating attraction to cisgender women, transwomen, transmen, genderqueer folks
- Quin, a 22-year-old White, cisgender gay man

Focus Group Participants
Focus Group One
- Lexi, an 18-year-old, White, genderqueer bisexual (who prefers female pronouns)
- Yara, a 20-year-old, biracial (Black/African American/Native American) cisgender lesbian

Focus Group Two
Participant(s) referenced in text as "participant from the cisgender gay men's focus group"
- 18-year-old, White, cisgender gay man
- 19-year-old, White, cisgender gay man
- 19-year-old, White, cisgender gay man [**Interviewee= Heyes]
- 22-year-old, White, cisgender gay man [*Interviewee= Reed]
APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT FLIER

Have thoughts on LGBTQ dating and conflict?
Consider participating in this research study!

The purpose of this study is to understand lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender + queer adolescents’ perceptions of dating violence.

- Volunteers can choose to participate in either a focus group or interview
- You do NOT need to have dating experience to participate
- The audio-taped focus groups/ interviews will last between 1-1 ½ hours

** All volunteers will receive a $15 gift card for their participation **

You may be eligible to participate if:
1) You are between 14 and 21 years old
2) You identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer
3) If you are under 18; you are willing (and it’s safe) to obtain parental consent

If you would like to learn more about participating, e-mail Leandra at LGBTdatingproject@gmail.com
APPENDIX C. STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Adolescents’ Perceptions of Dating Violence
Researcher: Leandra Smollin, MA, ph: 508-523-6908 / e-mail: Smollin.l@husky.neu.edu.
Principal Investigator: Ineke Marshall, Ph.D., ph: 617-373-4899 / e-mail: i.marshall@neu.edu.

This sheet provides more detail about my research study. I will be happy to answer any additional questions you may have, please feel free to contact me at 508-523-6908 or Smollin.l@husky.neu.edu. This is the information I will be sharing with youth interested in volunteering to participate in this study; most of this pertains to both the focus groups and the interviews, but you will find some specific information pertaining to each in some of the sections below:

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. You may ask me any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell me or e-mail me to let me know if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate. If you decide to participate, I will ask you to sign a statement and will give you a copy to keep. If you are under the age of 18, your parent/legal guardian will have to consent to your participation by also signing the consent document.

**Why are you doing this research study?**
As a Ph.D. student at Northeastern University, I am interested in finding out how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or otherwise queer-identified (LGBTQ) adolescents perceive the issue of dating violence. I think your opinions and perspectives are important, and that LGBTQ adolescents should be included in discussions about dating and relationships. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and opinions on the topic of dating violence among your peer group. This information will be useful for researchers, educators, and policy makers.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**
I am inviting you to be in this study because you are between the ages of 14 and 21 years old, and because you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. You do not have to have dating experience to be qualified for this study, as this study focuses on your opinions and thoughts on the topic, and not your own, personal experiences.

**What will I be asked to do?**

**FOCUS GROUP**
If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in one focus group. This focus group will be audio taped, however, we ask that you not identify yourself by name during the discussions. A focus group will consist of about six or seven other adolescents, who will join you in a facilitated discussion about your perceptions of dating violence. You may leave the focus group at any point. You may also skip any of the questions that you do not want to answer. At the end of the focus group, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey, which is completely voluntary.

**INTERVIEW**
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be interviewed about your perceptions of teen dating violence among LGBTQ adolescents. You may skip any of the questions that you do not want to answer, and stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audio taped and we ask that you not identify yourself by name during the discussion. At the end of the focus group, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey, which is completely voluntary.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

**FOCUS GROUP**
Focus groups will take place at a location which will allow our discussion to remain private and confidential, and every effort will be made to ensure that the location is easily accessible. For example, focus groups may be scheduled to occur in a study room in your town’s local library, or in a conference room at a local non-profit organization or college. Focus groups will probably last about one hour.

**INTERVIEW**
You will be interviewed at your convenience. The interview will take place somewhere convenient for you.
discussion to remain private and confidential, and that you feel comfortable with. This could be somewhere like a study room in your town’s local library, or I could come to your home (with the approval of your parent/legal guardian, if you are under the age of 18). Interviews will probably take between one and two hours, and you may stop the interview at any time.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?** You will not directly benefit by participating in this study. However, your participation may benefit LGBTQ youth communities in an indirect way by providing important information about LGBTQ adolescents’ perceptions of dating conflict and violence. This information is especially beneficial for educators, policy makers, and social service organizations seeking to be inclusive of the unique needs of LGBTQ youth.

**Will I be paid for my participation?** You will be given a $15 gift certificate for your participation.

**Can I stop my participation in this study? Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?** You may stop your participation in this study at any time, no matter what. The possible risks of the study are minimal: you may feel a little uncomfortable discussing issues relating to dating or dating violence, but at any time you may say that you do not want to answer any of the questions, stop talking about a certain topic, or stop participating. The risk may be higher if you are under the age of 18, as you have to obtain parental consent to participate in this research. If your parent/guardian does not know about your gender/sexual identity, is unsupportive; or if asking them for their consent may result in emotional or physical violence, you are strongly encouraged to choose not to participate.

**Is there anything else I need to know?** [For focus groups:] A domestic violence advocate with over 100 hours of training, and five years of direct-service experience will be present during and after each focus group. You will be provided with a list of free and confidential resources that are queer-friendly. If you are upset by anything that is discussed in the focus group, you may contact Leandra for more help accessing resources for support.

The researcher will comply with mandated reporting laws in Massachusetts. This means that if you are under the age of 18 and you say something that gives Leandra reasonable cause to believe your safety is at risk, she will have to file a report with the Department of Child and Family Services (DCF). For example, if you state that you are being victimized by a parent, or indicate that you are at risk of being seriously harmed or killed by your partner, Leandra will file a report. You are strongly encouraged not to discuss your own experiences, as this study is focused on your opinions about dating violence in LGBTQ communities.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (human studies committee) at Northeastern University. Any information gathered during the focus group is strictly confidential. Your name will not be recorded on any audiotape or transcript. Any reports or publications based on this research will use group data or assign a pseudonym for direct quotes. The audio recording will be stored on my computer and only I will have access to the recording. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be erased from her computer.

**Who may I contact if I have questions or problems?** You may speak with the Principal Investigator of this project, Ineke Marshall, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, at 617-373-4899, or i.marshall@neu.edu. You may also contact me, the researcher, Leandra Smollin, at 508-523-6908 or Smollin.l@husky.neu.edu.

**Who may I contact about my rights as a participant?** If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Human Subject Research Protection, Division of Research Integrity, 413 Lake Hall, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Their phone number is 617-373-7570. You may call anonymously if you wish.
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Leandra Smollin, MA and Ineke Marshall, PhD
Northeastern University, Department of Sociology

Title: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Adolescents’ Perceptions of Dating Violence

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher, Leandra Smollin, will also explain it to you in detail. You may ask Leandra any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell Leandra if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, Leandra will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep. If you are under the age of 18, your parent/legal guardian will have to consent to your participation by signing this document.

Why are you doing this research study?
As a Ph.D. student at Northeastern University, I am interested in finding out how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or otherwise queer-identified (LGBTQ) adolescents and young adults perceive the issue of dating relationships, conflict and violence. I think your opinions and perspectives are important, and that LGBTQ adolescents should be included in discussions about dating and relationships. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and opinions on this topic. This information will be useful for researchers, educators, and policy makers.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
I am inviting you to be in this study because you are between the ages of 14 and 21 years old, and because you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. You do not have to have dating experience to be qualified for this study, as the primary focus is on your opinions and thoughts on this topic and not your own personal experiences.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be interviewed about your perceptions of dating relationships, conflict and violence among LGBTQ adolescents and young adults. You may skip any of the questions that you do not want to answer, and stop the interview at any time. At the end of the interview, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey, which is completely voluntary.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at your convenience. The interview will take place somewhere that will allow our discussion to remain private and confidential, and that you feel comfortable with. This interview will be audio taped; you will not be asked to use your name during the interview. This could be somewhere like a study room in your town’s local library, or I could come to your home (with the approval of your parent/legal guardian, if you are under the age of 18). Interviews will probably take between one and two hours, and you may stop the interview at any time.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation will benefit LGBTQ communities in an indirect way by providing important information about LGBTQ adolescents’ and young adults’ perceptions of dating conflict and violence. This information is especially beneficial for educators, policy makers, and social service organizations seeking to be inclusive of the unique needs of LGBTQ youth and young adults.
Will I be paid for my participation? You will be given a $15 gift certificate at the conclusion of the interview.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me? Can I stop my participation in this study? The possible risks of the study are minimal: you may feel a little uncomfortable discussing issues relating to dating or dating violence, but at any time you may say that you do not want to answer any of the questions, stop talking about a certain topic, or stop participating. The risk may be higher if you are under the age of 18, as you have to obtain parental consent to participate in this research. If your parent/guardian does not know about your gender/sexual identity, is unsupportive; or if asking them for their consent may result in emotional or physical violence, you are strongly encouraged to choose not to participate.

Is there anything else I need to know? The researcher will comply with mandated reporting laws in Massachusetts. This means that if you are under the age of 18 and you say something that gives Leandra reasonable cause to believe your safety is at risk, she will have to file a report with the Department of Child and Family Services (DCF). For example, if you state that you are being victimized by a parent, or indicate that you are at risk of being seriously harmed or killed by your partner, Leandra will file a report. That being said, you are strongly encouraged not to discuss your own experiences, as this study is focused on your opinions about dating violence in LGBTQ communities.

You will be provided with a list of free and confidential resources that are queer-friendly. If you are upset by anything that is discussed during the interview, you may contact Leandra for more help accessing resources.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (human studies committee) at Northeastern University. Any information gathered during the interview is strictly confidential. Your name will not be mentioned during the interview, so it will not be recorded on any audiotapes or transcripts. Any reports or publications based on this research will assign a pseudonym. The tape-recorded interviews will be stored on Leandra’s computer and only she will have access to the recording. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be erased from her computer.

Who may I contact if I have questions or problems? You may speak with the Principal Investigator of this project, Ineke Marshall, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, at 617-373-4899, or i.marshall@neu.edu. You may also contact the researcher, Leandra Smollin, MA, at 508-523-6908 or LGBTdatingproject@gmail.com.

Who may I contact about my rights as a participant? If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Their phone number is 617-373-7570 and their e-mail is irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Please feel free to ask questions at any time.
Title: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Adolescents’ Perceptions of Dating Violence

I agree to take part in this research.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in research       Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in research

If person assenting to take part in research is under the age of 18 years old, a parent or legal guardian must complete the following section:

I have read this document and agree to allow my child to take part in this research.

Signature of parent/ legal guardian       Date

Printed name of parent/ legal guardian

Signature of person who explained the study and obtained informed consent       Date
APPENDIX E. FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Northeastern University
Human Subject Research Protection

Leandra Smolkin, MA and Ineke Marshall, PhD
Northeastern University, Department of Sociology

Title: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Adolescents’ Perceptions of Dating Violence

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but what you need to do, what is the purpose of the study, and what you will be asked to do. You may ask Leandra any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell Leandra if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate. If you decide to participate, Leandra will ask you to sign this statement and give you a copy to keep. If you are under the age of 18, your parent/legal guardian will have to consent to your participation by signing this document.

Why are you doing this research study? As a Ph.D. student at Northeastern University, I am interested in finding out how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or otherwise queer-identified (LGBTQ) adolescents and young adults perceive the issue of dating relationships, conflict and violence. I think your opinions and perspectives are important, and that LGBTQ adolescents should be included in discussions about dating and relationships. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and opinions on this topic. This information will be useful for researchers, educators, and policy makers.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? I am inviting you to be in this study because you are between the ages of 14 and 21 years old, and because you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. You do not have to have dating experience to be qualified for this study, as the primary focus is on your opinions and thoughts on this topic and not your own personal experiences.

What will I be asked to do? If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in one audiotaped focus group. A focus group will consist of about three to seven other adolescents/young adults, who will join you in a facilitated discussion about your perceptions of dating violence. During these discussion we ask that you do not use your real name. You may leave the focus group at any point. You may also skip any of the questions that you do not want to answer. At the end of the focus group, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey, which is completely voluntary and we will not ask you to record your name.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take? Focus groups will take place at a location, which will allow our discussion to remain private and confidential, and every effort will be made to ensure that the location is easily accessible. For example, focus groups may be scheduled to occur in a study room in your town’s local library, or in a conference room at a local non-profit organization or college. Focus groups will probably last about one hour.

Will I benefit by being in this research? You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, your participation will benefit LGBTQ youth communities in an indirect way by generating important information about LGBTQ adolescents’ perceptions of dating conflict and violence. This information is especially beneficial for educators, policy makers, and social service organizations seeking to be inclusive of the unique needs of LGBTQ youth and young adults.
Will I be paid for my participation?  You will be given a $15 gift certificate at the conclusion of the focus group.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me? Can I stop my participation in this study?  The possible risks of the study are minimal: you may feel a little uncomfortable discussing issues relating to dating or dating violence, but at any time you may say that you do not want to answer any of the questions, stop talking about a certain topic, or stop participating. The risk may be higher if you are under the age of 18, as you have to obtain parental consent to participate in this research. If your parent/guardian does not know about your gender/sexual identity, is unsupportive, or if asking them for their consent may result in any type of violence, you are strongly encouraged to choose not to participate.

Is there anything else I need to know?  A domestic violence advocate with over 100 hours of training, and five years of direct-service experience will be present during and after each focus group. You will be provided with a list of free and confidential resources that are queer-friendly. If you are upset by anything that is discussed in the focus group, you may contact Leandra (contact information is below) for more help accessing resources for support.

The researcher will comply with mandated reporting laws in Massachusetts. This means that if you are under the age of 18 and you say something that gives Leandra reasonable cause to believe your safety is at risk, she will have to file a report with the Department of Child and Family Services (DCF). For example, if you state that you are being victimized by a parent, or indicate that you are at risk of being seriously harmed or killed by your partner, Leandra will file a report. You are strongly encouraged not to discuss your own experiences, as this study is focused on your opinions about dating violence in LGBTQ communities.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (human studies committee) at Northeastern University. Any information gathered during the focus group is strictly confidential. Your name will not be mentioned during the focus group, so it will not be recorded on the audiotape or transcript. Any reports or publications based on this research will use group data or assign a pseudonym for direct quotes. The audio recording will be stored on Leandra’s computer and only she will have access to the recording. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be erased from her computer.

Who may I contact if I have questions or problems?  You may speak with the Principal Investigator of this project, Ineke Marshall, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, 617-373-4899 or i.marshall@neu.edu. You may also contact the researcher, Leandra Smollin, 508-523-6908 or LGBTdatingproject@gmail.com.

Who may I contact about my rights as a participant?  If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Their phone number is 617-373-7570 and their e-mail is irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously.

Please feel free to ask questions at any time.
Focus Group
Informed Consent Document

Leandra Smollin, MA and Ineke Marshall, PhD
Northeastern University, Department of Sociology

Title: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Adolescents' Perceptions of Dating Violence

I agree to take part in this research.

__________________________  ____________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in research  Date

__________________________
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in research

If person assenting to take part in research is under the age of 18 years old, a parent or legal guardian must complete the following section:

I have read this document and agree to allow my child to take part in this research.

__________________________  ____________________________
Signature of parent/ legal guardian  Date

__________________________
Printed name of parent/ legal guardian

__________________________  ____________________________
Signature of person who explained the study and obtained informed consent  Date
APPENDIX F. RESOURCE LIST

QUEER-FRIENDLY RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

The Network / La Red
Hotline/Linea de Crisis: 617.742.4911
http://www.thenetworklared.org/
TTY: 617.227.4911  General: 617.423.7233
The Network/La Red: Ending abuse in lesbian, bisexual women's, and transgender communities, offers free and confidential hotline services, emergency shelter, advocacy, support groups, and social/legal/medical housing assistance.

Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project
Hotline: 1.800.832.1901  General: 617.354.6056
http://www.gmdvp.org/
Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project (GMDVP) supports victims and survivors through education, advocacy and direct services. Understanding that the serious public health issue of domestic violence is not gender specific, GMDVP serves men in relationships with men, regardless of how they identify, and stand ready to assist them in navigating through abusive relationships.

H.A.W.C., Healing Abuse Helping For Change
Hotline: 1.800.547.1649
http://www.helpabusedwomen.org/
H.A.W.C.'s direct services are provided in 23 cities and towns throughout the North Shore. The main office is in Salem. All services are free and confidential, and include a 24-hour hotline, individual short-term counseling and support groups.

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
24-hour Hotline: 800.841.8371  General: 617.492.7273
http://www.barcc.org/
All of our services are free and confidential for all people ages 12 and older. We serve survivors, their family and friends, and professionals, offering: medical advocacy, legal services, counseling services, counseling and education groups, case management community education, professional training.

Violence Recovery Program, Fenway Community Health
General: 617.927.6250 or 1.800.834.3242
http://www.fenwayhealth.org [Search for Violence Recovery Program]
The Violence Recovery Program (VRP) at Fenway Health was founded in 1986 and was formerly known as the "Victim Recovery Program." The VRP provides counseling, support groups, advocacy, and referral services to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) victims of bias crime, domestic violence, sexual assault and police misconduct.
OTHER RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Peer Listening Line, Fenway Community Health
Hotline: 617.267.2535, toll-free at 1.800.399.PEER / 1.800.399.7337
http://www.fenwayhealth.org [Search for Peer Listening Line]
Fenway Health’s Peer Listening Line is anonymous and confidential phone line that offers gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender and youths a “safe place” to call to receive help, information, referrals, and support for a range of issues without being judged or rushed into any decision you are not prepared to make. You can talk to trained volunteers about safer sex, coming out, where to find gay-friendly establishments, HIV and AIDS, depression, suicide, and anti-gay/lesbian harassment and violence. No matter what is on your mind, they are there to encourage and ensure you that you are not alone.

Trevor Helpline Crisis Intervention for LGBT Youth 1.800.850.8078 Available anytime

HIV/AIDS Information: National AIDS Info Line 1.800.342.2437 Available anytime

AIDS Hotline for teens 1.800.234.8336 M-F, 3-7 p.m. EST

Sexually Transmitted Disease Information 1.800.227.8922 M-F, 8 a.m.-11 p.m.

Homeless / Runaway Help: The Nine Line 1.800.999.9999 Available anytime

Websites

www.youthresource.com Amplify Your Voice: A web site for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth.

www.ambientejoven.org Site por y para jovenes GLBT. / A bilingual web site for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Latino/a youth.

www.advocatesforyouth.org Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. Advocates believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health.

www.sxetc.org Sex education by teens, for teens.
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